

MARCH 2022

SWEDEN

PLAYBOY

SEX
ACTIVIST
STOYA

THE LEADER
PORN NEEDS
NOW!

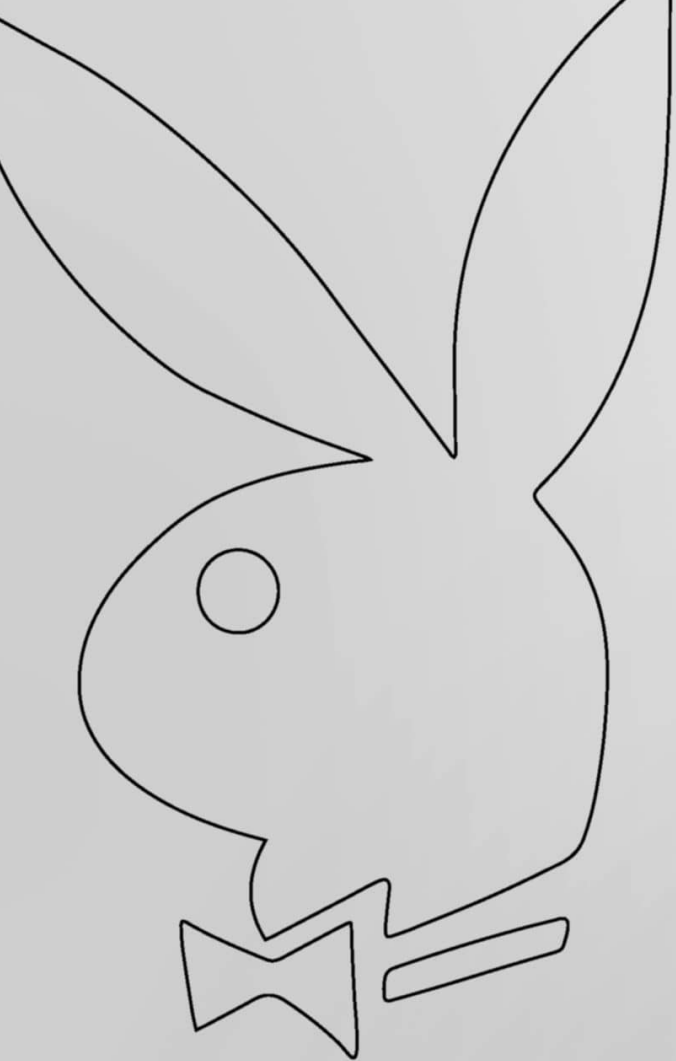
20 Q
WITH
KOKO

AND WHY
SHE'S SO
EXTRAORDINARY

ISRAEL CASSOL

WWW.PLAYBOYMAGSWEDEN.COM 59 SEK







EVERY
ISSUE.
EVER.

The complete Playboy archive.

Instant access to every issue, article, story, and pictorial
Playboy has everpublished – only on iPlayboy.com.



VISIT PLAYBOY.COM/ARCHIVE

PLAYBOY
S W E D E N

Editor-in-Chief **Dirk Steenekamp**

Associate Editor **Jason Fleetwood**

Graphic Designer **Koketso Moganetsi**

Fashion Editor **Lexie Robb**

Grooming Editor **Greg Forbes**

Gaming Editor **Andre Coetzer**

Tech Editor **Peter Wolff**

Illustrations **Toon53 Productions**

Motoring Editor **John Page**

Senior Photo Editor **Luba V Nel**

ADVERTISING SALES **pieter@dhsmedia.co.za**

for more information

PHONE: +27 10 006 0051

MAIL: PO Box 71450, Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2021

ADDRESS: First Floor Block 6 Fourways Office Park, Cnr Roos Street & Fourways Boulevard, 2191

EMAIL: info@dhsmedia.co.za

WEB: www.playboymagsweden.com

FACEBOOK: facebook.com/PlayBSweden

INSTAGRAM: [playboymag_sweden](https://instagram.com/playboymag_sweden)

PLAYBOY INTERNATIONAL GROUP

Reena Patel, PhD. President, International, Operations & Strategy

Hazel Thomson, Senior Director, International Licensing

PLAYBOY Sweden is published by DHS Media House. Material in this publication, including text and images, is protected by copyright. It may not be copied, reproduced, republished, posted, broadcast, or transmitted in any way without written consent of DHS Media House. The views and opinions expressed in PLAYBOY Sweden by the contributors may not represent the views of the publishers. DHS Media House accepts no responsibility for any loss that may be suffered by any person who relies totally or partially upon any information, description, or pictures contained herein. DHS Media House is not liable for any mistake, misprint, or typographic errors. Any submissions to PLAYBOY Sweden become the property of DHS Media House. The name "PLAYBOY" and the PLAYBOY logo are registered trademarks of PLAYBOY USA, and used under license by (publisher). All rights reserved. The United States edition of PLAYBOY is published monthly by PLAYBOY.

CONTENTS

06 **COMEDIAN ALI WONG**
On changing perceptions & being a mom

08 **SEX ACTIVIST STOYA**
The leader porn needs now!

12 **ENHANCE YOUR SEX LIFE**
With openness and great, yummy food

20 **NOVELIST PAUL BEATTY**
Is making room for writers of color

22 **MEDIA WUNDERKIND NOOR TAGOURI**
Makes a forceful case for modesty

24 **FRONTWOMAN LAURA JANE GRACE**
The punk rocker fights for what she believes in

26 **ICONOCLAST JASON DILL**
Returning skateboarding to its roots

28 **INDIE DEVELOPER SEAN MURRAY**
Boldly goes where no gamer has gone before

32 **ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE**
Contemporary artists reimagine sexuality in art

40 **ON THE COVER**
ISRAEL CASSOL

50 **MONEY TALKS**
How your wallet can change the world

52 **20Q WITH KOKO**
And why she's so extraordinary

54 **CALLING ALL VOTERS**
Influential thinkers discuss politics

56 **DOPE TUTOR**
Where to buy black-owned weed

58 **DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**
Why journalists aren't expendable

64 **PICTORIAL**
CLAUDIA FIJAL

72 **PBI ARCHIVES JERRY SEINFELD**
A candid conversation with TV's top-rated comic

84 **PICTORIAL**
GIGI PAYOVICH

92 **INSIDE TIM & ERIC**
Awesome Show, Great Job



ON THE COVER
ISRAEL CASSOL
Photography by Glauber Bassi
No 54 | **March 2022**

STAY PLAYFUL.

One-of-a-kind products.

The official site for Playboy clothing,
exclusive collections, accessories, and more.

VISIT [PLAYBOYCLOTHING.COM.AU](https://playboyclothing.com.au)



©2021 Playboy Enterprises International, Inc. Playboy and the Rabbit Head Design are
trademarks of Playboy Enterprises International, Inc. and used under license by Atomic.

[PLAYBOYCLOTHING.COM.AU](https://playboyclothing.com.au)



Comedian Ali Wong Changes Perceptions, Diapers

The groundbreaking comedian and ‘Fresh Off the Boat’ writer tells us about life after her smash stand-up special ‘Baby Cobra’

BY **JAMIE LOFTUS**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**

Ali Wong wanted it all (career, relationship, baby), got it all and mined every last minute of it in the process. The comedian currently juggles her mom duties, her day gig as a writer on acclaimed sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat* and her thriving stand-up career—while taking every conventional rule of comedy and bending it to her liking.

Wong’s Netflix special, *Baby Cobra*, filmed when she was more than seven months pregnant, is truly hilarious and groundbreaking. Now, as a new mother, she’s on another mission: speaking openly about finding a balance between her hormones’ command to stay home with her daughter and her professional need to stick to the comedy grind. The good news? Whatever she’s doing, it’s working.

And while the crowds may be growing exponentially, the objective of an Ali Wong show has always been the same. “I want people to laugh to the point that they can’t think.”

PLAYBOY: What’s the biggest challenge you face as a comedian right now?

WONG: Finding time to hone my new jokes, while spending as much time with my daughter as possible, has been challenging. I can’t travel frequently to perform, or go anywhere far, or for very long.

PLAYBOY: How are these challenges different from the ones you had five years ago?

WONG: I said yes to every single stand-up gig offer before. But traveling to some of these places to perform was often so lonely. I’d feel so isolated during the day and miss sleeping in my own bed so much. Now when I’m on the road, the accommodations are a lot nicer and I savor my time alone. But I’m also constantly thinking about my family and getting back to them.

PLAYBOY: Have you received a lot of internet backlash through the years?

WONG: I don’t spend much time on social media. Especially now that I have a baby, I can’t be ignoring her for the sake of reading all these “mentions.” I also just accept that I’m not for everybody.

PLAYBOY: Was there a time where you tried to play by the typical “rules” of being a comedian? When did you realize you wanted something different?

WONG: I’ve always wanted to be a household name as a stand-up comic and also be a mother. And I always knew that I wanted both so bad that I was not going to accept that they were mutually exclusive. After I gave birth to my daughter, it would have been really easy to dive into motherhood 100 percent and take a big step back from stand-up comedy. My hormones were commanding me to. But all of the momentum from *Baby Cobra* has bred all of these amazing new opportunities that I just can’t say no to.

PLAYBOY: What has surprised you the most about

the response to *Baby Cobra*?

WONG: I didn’t anticipate how much of a game changer it would be. Last year in San Francisco, before *Baby Cobra*, they had to put some of my tickets at this 400-seat venue, where I was performing four shows, on Groupon because I couldn’t sell all of the seats. Now this year, at that same venue, tickets for five shows sold out in less than one minute, six months prior to the show dates. Also, I just can’t get over what my hero Bill Burr has had to say about *Baby Cobra*. That he even watched it pretty much made my year.

PLAYBOY: What would you like to see more of in comedy?

WONG: Well, specifically in TV, I would like to see more female showrunners. In comedy, there’s no tougher and more influential job than a TV showrunner. They make all of the most important creative decisions for TV, which is continues to be such an exciting medium. But for the few female showrunners who are out there, I’m just obsessed and in awe of them. I bow down to Jill Solloway (*Transparent*), Jenji Kohan (*Orange Is the New Black*), Tina Fey (*Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*), Nahnatchka Khan (*Fresh Off the Boat*), Marti Noxon (*UnReal*) and Pam Brady (*Lady Dynamite*). They have created and are driving some of the most funny and groundbreaking television right now.

PLAYBOY: What do you want people to take away from an Ali Wong show?

WONG: I want people to laugh to the point where they can’t think. When people come see me live, I want them to not even remember what really happened or what I said because they were too busy having joy overcome their body.

PLAYBOY’s 2016 Renegades: The men and women in this series will change how you think about business, music, porn, comedy, gaming and more. They’ve risked it all—even their lives—to do what they love, showing us what can be accomplished if we break the rules. Meet the Renegades: Paul Beatty, Ali Wong, Laura Jane Grace, Sean Murray, Noor Tagouri, Stoya and Jason Dill.



Sex Activist Stoya

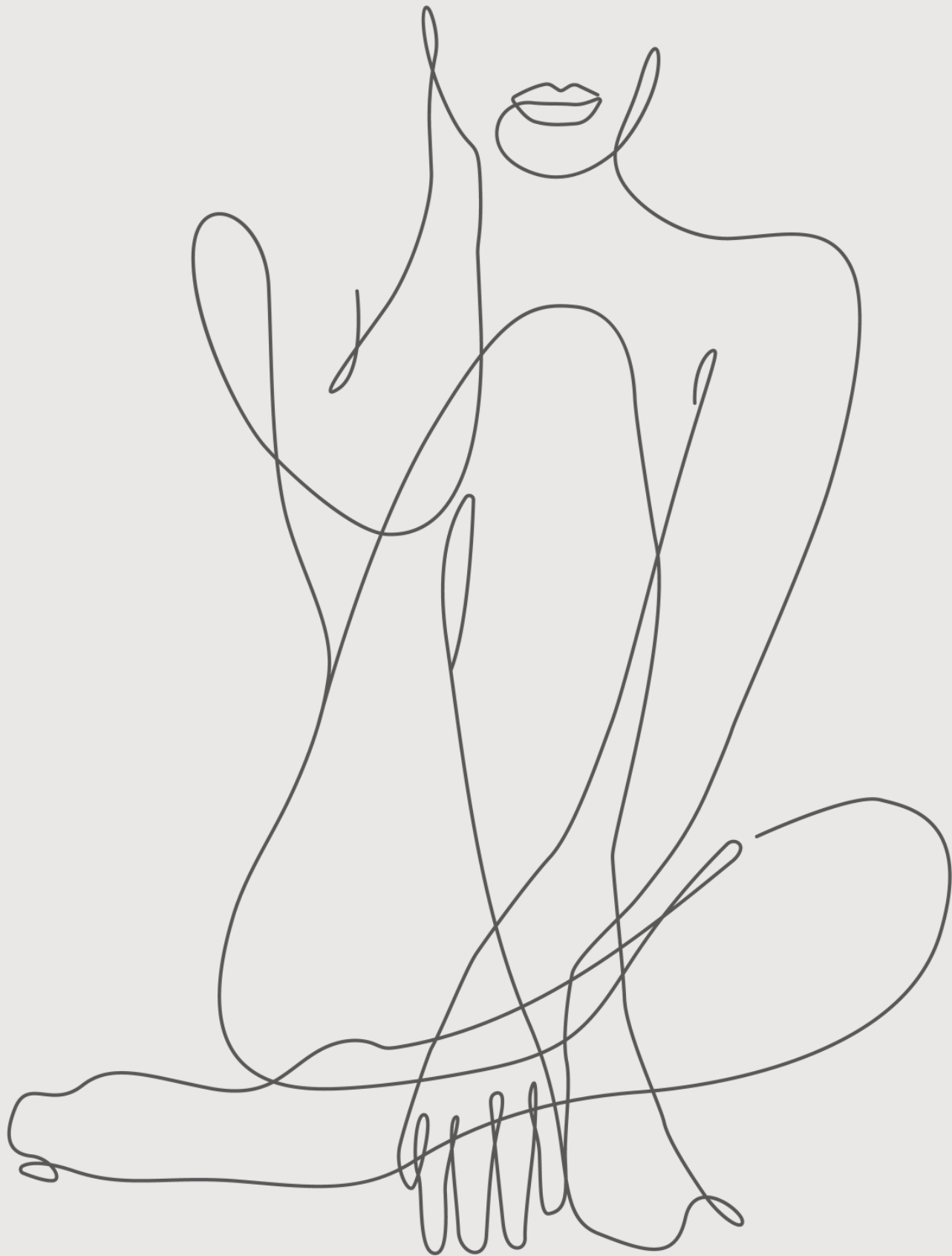
Is the Leader

Porn Needs Now

Co-founder of the genre-defying porn site TrenchcoatX, activist and sex star Stoya talks to Playboy about love, beauty and dealing with the haters

BY MOLLY CRABAPPLE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN LOWRY



It's hard to capture an old friend in one anecdote, but I'll try. The time is two a.m., and Stoya and I are smoking outside an East Village bar. A mink hangs from her shoulders. The streetlights catch her feline cheekbones like a kiss. Stoya tells me about the mid-19th century prima ballerina Emma Livry. In an era when dancers routinely caught fire from stage lights, Livry refused to destroy the ethereality of her art by soaking her tutu in flame retardant. When she died of burns, she had no regrets. Stoya notes that panic about safety often focuses on the bodies, and the choices, of young women. She wonders why no one thought to move the lights.

This moment hints at Stoya's ferocious mix of glamour, toughness and nerdery. A classically trained ballerina until an injury in her mid-teens ruined her prospects, Stoya became a porn star—and I use the word star in the sense that applies to Garbo. She has written for The New York Times, starred in a Serbian sci-fi film (the upcoming Ederlezi Rising) and trained as an aerialist in Moscow. She has also moved into entrepreneurship, co-founding the genre-defying porn site TrenchcoatX.

When one of the biggest porn studios in the country treated her with disrespect, she chose to work as a waitress rather than kowtow. No matter what she does, Stoya exudes a fierce, hard-won sense of freedom.

PLAYBOY: What challenges do you face every day in the course of your work?

STOYA: What day is it, because just about every day the challenge is different. That's the nature of challenge. This month, my big challenge is learning how to deal with the bureaucratic and office end of running a porn production company and website. This time last year, my challenge was, "Oh fuck, our first programmer bailed on us, and the new one doesn't have time to figure out how the first one was doing it, so how am I going to learn enough HTML to get my shit together?"

PLAYBOY: How do you balance your art, your ethical/political ideals and the grind of running a business?

STOYA: Pessimism time: The question for me there is less about how I hope to balance those, and more, "Is it possible to have a financially viable business at an increasingly large

scale while doing things in the way that seems most right?"

PLAYBOY: How do you deal with backlash?

STOYA: Which backlash? The backlash from people from whatever extremist religion—underline italics bold, it's not the Christians, not the Muslims, it's whichever religion's gone crazy pants off the rails—who think some book written however the fuck long ago that said people who have sex in whatever proscribed way aren't people? Is it the backlash from feminists who say I'm a traitor to women? Or from other feminists who want to put sex in a box where its all sunshine and daisies and and where all porn is—barf—empowering? Is it the backlash from the people who have no problems with porn but think it's disgusting that I smoke cigarettes? I just try not to engage. The only times I can't avoid engaging with it are when there's a well-intentioned fan who thinks "fuck the haters" is a rallying cry, or when some journalist throws the worst shit people say about you in your face.

PLAYBOY: I want to talk about beauty—and I mean beauty in the larger sense, not in the sense used to sell face cream.**

STOYA: Beauty is the thing that makes it worth it. It's what makes you drag your ass out of bed in the morning. It's what makes you continue to respond to the internal question, Why bother?

PLAYBOY: Your professional name, Stoya, is a tribute to your Serbian grandmother, and you recently starred in Ederlezi Rising, a Serbian sci-fi romance. What does your Serbian heritage mean to you?

STOYA: There's a very specific mix of realism and hope that I always saw in my grandmother and that I see in Serbia. Pragmatism might be a more precise word than realism. In the West, specially the English speaking West, we have so many pompous bags of air in suits. We see them go on television or on Twitter, and I've sat across from some of them in their offices. They promise people the most outlandish things. Anyone looking rationally at what they have to work with knows they're full of shit. They're as self-aggrandizing and empty as the Wizard of Oz. My grandmother makes amazing things with no resources. You know those Styrofoam trays that meat comes in? My grandmother would build whole landscapes from those trays. Landscapes, from actual trash. That's looking at what is actually there, which is trash, and transforming it with some paint and some effort and a shit-ton of creativity. Everyone who worked on Ederlezi Rising in Serbia is like that. I've been in pornos with budgets bigger than Ederlezi Rising has, and it's beautiful.

PLAYBOY: How has training as a ballerina affected your life?

STOYA: It gave me a near suicidal work ethic. It gave me a very interesting relationship to physical sensations of pain—by this I mean complex and multilayered. For people who took a lot of dance instruction in youth, and went into sex or sex-work-adjacent work, it seems pretty common to have a multifaceted masochism that relates to lived experience in a dance studio. Of course, ballet gives one a well-practiced awareness of one's body that comes in super handy when one is in front of camera.

PLAYBOY: One of the things I've always seen and admired in you is this fierce, hard-won sense of freedom. I'd love to hear you riff on what freedom means to you.

STOYA: First we have to acknowledge capitalism. Money exerts behavioral control in so many ways; that's the frontline of behavioral control in the US. You spend your childhood hearing you have to do this and that to get into a good college, to get a degree to get a good job and buy shit. It's not even presented as "buy shit" but as having things integral to adulthood, to fulfilling the promise of the American dream, like a very large house that costs a lot to keep warm in the winter. That's broken in me. I don't have that button. I don't have the "how will you have that lifestyle" button. I just sort of don't care. Which could work very much against me in the context of how to run a business, but it works in the context of being happy with the work I'm doing and the conditions I'm doing it in, and its driven me to a point where the only dudes in suits I have to answer to are VISA, MasterCard and the IRS

"Beauty is the thing that makes it worth it. It's what makes you continue to respond to the question, Why bother?"



ENHANCE YOUR SEX LIFE

WITH OPENNESS
AND GREAT,
YUMMY FOOD!

Want the girl or man of your dreams to love you? Want to make them happy in every single way? Want to know the secrets of how to use food to win them over? Well, that's exactly what Playboy did by sitting down with Michael Newman, known as one of the top Chefs on the hit television program "MasterChef: Legends" with Gordon Ramsay and his beautiful wife Basia, who preach about how their home-cooked meals and ideas will lead everyone to a better, healthier lifestyle... and better sex!



As a married couple, how do you keep the spark alive both in and out of the bedroom? As a married couple, the reason we are able to keep the spark alive in and out of the bedroom is by keeping complete transparency and communication to what each one of our needs may be, sexually and emotionally. We are also committed to our Tantric lifestyle training, which allows us to keep the energy in our relationship fun, fresh, and magical. These practices allow our feelings for one another to remain euphoric, even after almost 12 years we continually flirt, laugh, and date one another as if it's like a brand new relationship. Role-playing is a great example of having fun, being adventurous, and risqué. This type of play can be done in and out of the bedroom. It keeps life mysterious and the feeling of wanting more of this type of sexy vulnerable play.

What about each other do you find is the most attractive quality in a physical sense? What we find to be the most attractive quality in a physical sense is for me Basia, are Michael's thighs. I love a man with big sexy thighs. It's such a turn-on for me to see Michael wearing a pair of tight jeans and I can almost see

everything through them. The rest is left to my imagination. As for myself Michael, I find Basia's ass to be incredibly curvy, sexy, and exactly what a great ass should look like. It also turns me on to see her amazing breasts especially when she squeezes them in a tight bra and they are almost revealed. But as I always tell Basia that I love her boobs, I also remind her that they are only window dressings for her beautiful self. I truly like to say that boobs are uptown shopping for downtown business if you get what I'm saying.

Michael - you were just on the hit television program Masterchef alongside Gordon Ramsay... how was that experience? My experience from being on the hit culinary cooking competition MasterChef: Legends with Gordon Ramsay was one of the most exciting yet emotionally trying experiences of my life. Having a Legend chef like Gordon Ramsay alongside Chef Aarón Sánchez, Joe Bastianich, and the culinary legend of the week was extremely intimidating, but also very gratifying as it was an honor each time I got to cook for these Legendary chefs. It also changed my life because it opened my eyes to the value of constructive

criticism. Whether it be helping people sexually or personally through our lifestyle brand JerseyStyle, my Michelin star style of cooking in the kitchen or helping myself in my own personal relationships. It all comes down to being open and honest with yourself. This openness will give you the ability to honestly reevaluate yourself and make yourself a better person in all aspects of your life.

Michael - being on that show, has it led to lots of women sliding into your DMs? Hmm... Yeah, since being on the show, FOX's hit culinary competition MasterChef Legends has resulted in not only lots of women sliding into the DM's and sending me/us requests for risqué content. I am receiving lots of personal DM's from men for even more revealing sexy photos and videos, which in itself I find to be flattering.

Does food really help one's sex life? What type of foods will help? Yes, food really does help one's sex life because certain food can boost libido, increase sex drive, and promote healthy blood flow to the genitals for both males and females. Food also releases the same happy outer body endorphins and orgasmic sen-

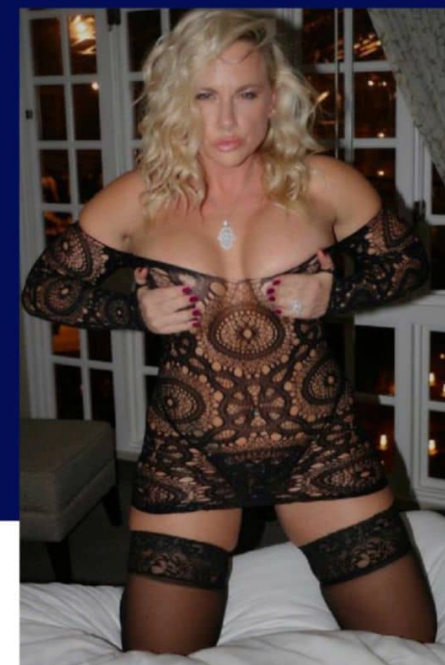


sations, just as sexual pleasure does and should. You can incorporate food in the kitchen by making a sexy meal together while flirting and touching. Or you can take it to the bedroom and get really naughty and do lots of fun and playful things using all your senses. Some of the best types of foods that will help your sex life are as follows: red wine, artichokes, chocolate, oysters, anything with fresh ginger, strawberries, blueberries, spicy foods especially peppers, and saffron. All these foods consumed consistently will help your sex life in the long run.

Tip: when having these types of exotic experiences, get yourself a waterproof mattress cover or a blowup air bed, which we find to be the BEST pleasure play for sex. It bounces, slides, and does things that your bed can't do. The most INTENSE sex we have had, has always been on an air mattress.

What types of food can be used in the bedroom? Any type of foods that you and your partner crave or desire can be used in the bedroom. For example, if you blindfold your partner for some sexy foreplay, you can activate all the senses by letting your partner smell, taste, and feel the texture or lightly brushing them with these foods increasing their anticipation and excitement for the sexual pleasure play that's about to ensue. Some of the best foods we love playing with are champagne, honey, chocolate syrup, cupcakes, ice cream, and some obvious ones like different fruits, chocolate, and the classic whip cream.

When it comes to the Tantra lifestyle, what is your advice to those who want to get into it? The advice we have for those looking to explore the Tantric lifestyle is to educate yourself by reading a book or two. One of our favorite books we enjoy and





recommend to read is Urban Tantra by Barbara Carrellas. You can also take an introduction to Tantra class, which we will be offering and hosting along with other lifestyle seminars in the very near future. We've received several Tantric trainings over the last couple of years and we plan on continuing our tantra education for ourselves. We also believe that you must be open to what the tantric lifestyle offers, enabling you to reap the full benefits and allow yourself to let your guard down. This will free yourself from the shame and guilt that sexual pleas-

ure carries with it. Taking these actions will also open your mind, body, and soul up for the magical energetic exchanges that you can experience with yourself and others. We know first-hand from helping numerous clients that these practices can and will help you. When you do, you should be ready to heal from any past traumatic events that you may have experienced in your life, but you MUST be open and be ready to be healed.

What is something you both still want to try when it comes to sex?

When it comes to sex, we have had a wide variety of fun, organic, and erotic experiences together. I, Basia would love to have a foursome one day if the situation is right. I/we are totally into organic connections, never forcing a situation to be something we want, but would regret. We feel like we fall under the Pan Sexual category (though we hate labels) we are into people's energies and we also MUST all connect and all have physical attractions to one another.

As for Michael, he would want a FMF situation, which has happened

with us in the past but his fantasy is for all three participants to climax in extreme ecstasy altogether. He believes that's true sexual fulfillment for him is to cum and to be able to bring two women to climax all at the same time.

How important is communication overall in a relationship and when having sex? Communication is very important to a healthy relationship in every situation. By being open and honest with each other, you can strengthen your bond and your relationship simply through openly

communicating about what may be on your mind emotionally and/or sexually. When you do this, you are able to address issues out in the open before they become built up and create a barrier. These barriers could in turn affect your relationship on every level.

Also, communicating your erotic sensual needs and desires can only enhance your sexual relationship the same as it has for our relationship. Since your partner cannot read your mind, making sure you have full open communication, this should remove any embarrassment

or shame associated with one's personal sexual needs.

If you ask your partner to be open to your needs and desires, they will be more comfortable opening up and telling you what their own naughty needs and desires are. The reason we strongly suggest being open in and out of the bedroom (especially in the bedroom) is so your partner or yourself can experience the most euphoric orgasms. As for women, that can be multiple orgasms or even experience a few of the different types of orgasms our magical yoni blesses us with.



DoggyStyle vs. JerseyStyle... which is better!?

Good question. To begin with, they are hard to compare as doggystyle is a sexual position that has been around for centuries (which is one of Basia's favorites) and can only be performed one way, doggystyle. I mean, who doesn't like doggy style, it's been around much longer than our lifestyle brand, JerseyStyle. You see JerseyStyle, is only 6 years old. Even though it may not be as well-known as doggystyle, can help you free yourself of the shame and guilt of enjoying sex if you're open to it. Being a lifestyle brand, we teach you to love yourself first through tantric breathing and energy exchanges, allowing you to free yourself of any mental blocks that may be holding you back from achieving magical bliss #ORGASM. This can be achieved with the help of our coaching services, which entails a healthy lifestyle by eating right, working out, and having a positive mindset. These practices will lead you to having more self-confidence and sexiness. When this happens, people notice and they will want to know what has changed in your life. In reality, the only thing that has changed is your love for yourself and your body.

Anything else fun you'd like to add or include with our readers? Here are a few tips we would like to add for both men and women that will help enhance their personal sex life.

- Leave any sexual judgment at the door. What turns you on may not be exactly what turns your partner on or vice versa. So be open to exploration.
- Ladies, know your body especially by exploring yourself, locating your most sensitive erogenous zones. There are thousands of nerve endings in your magical yoni that can provide you with endless pleasure once you become one with yourself. Then, be sure to communicate that to any lover or partner because they don't know what your erogenous zones are or where you are most sensitive without clear and direct communication.
- Men, limit your porn time as you will become desensitized by the overstimulation and too much masturbation. It also gives you an unrealistic expectation about what a real sexual connection truly is. Remember, porn is a story with acting and editing, not a real-life sexual situation.
- Ladies, did you know your pelvic chakra area as I love to call it the "Yoni" (vjj) is capable of achieving 7 different types of orgasms? That's right ladies, I said 7. Each type of orgasm releases different waves of pleasure that I'm sure you would all love to experience.
- This one's for men and it's so simple. Com-

pliment women all the time. They spend hours getting ready by picking out a sexy outfit and the perfect shoes to match and getting their hair, nails, makeup done only to go unnoticed, so COMPLIMENT them as often as possible for a happier and healthier love life.

- Lastly, have a sexy and naughty photoshoot with your partner. Let it be fun, sexy, and mysterious. We promise you it will enhance your love life not only sexually, but emotionally.





Novelist Paul Beatty Is Making Room for Writers of Color

The Man Booker Prize winner discusses his latest risk-taking work, the challenges of writing and the power of language and literature.

BY JAMES YEH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN LOWRY

"There's still this notion that there's only room for one fucker. It's just, can we have a range? That's all we're asking for."

Paul Beatty may be America's most hilarious—and subversive—writer. In September, the Los Angeles native's daring fourth novel, *The Sellout*, was short-listed for the prestigious 2016 Man Booker Prize. The gleefully unhinged satire follows the misadventures of one Bonbon Me, an urban weed and watermelon farmer whose father, a prominent psychologist and "Nigger Whisperer," is gunned down by the LAPD. With the settlement money, Bonbon reinstitutes segregation, acquires an elderly slave and lands himself, stoned, before a baffled Supreme Court.

"It all starts with the language," says the 54-year-old author (who was also the first-ever Grand Poetry Slam champion, in 1990). "That's where all the latticework is for me." Indeed, the thrill of *The Sellout* lies not only in Beatty's delirious conceit but also in his virtuoso riffs that take bull's-eye aim at race, class, pop culture and propriety in our supposedly postracial America.

"I get nervous when things don't make people nervous," Beatty says. "A lot of writers of color feel there are certain directions they have to take: what your point of view should be, who can do what, how positive it has to be. Somebody's always going to tell you what it means to be a black writer, what responsibilities you have. Just trying to create some space is important to me."

And that's exactly what Beatty does, obliterating the boundaries of what is funny, what is profane and what is just so sad and unfixable that we can only laugh to keep from crying. There's a bit of truth in every good joke, and perhaps in that truth we are able, after the laughs subside, to better see the world and ourselves in it.

PLAYBOY: How do you deal with the challenges of being a writer?

BEATTY: I don't really believe there's a point to anything, a purpose—not to the point that things don't make a difference or don't have meaning, but I just don't care whether it does. So I think that makes it a little easier, takes a bit of the pressure off. Writing's hard; it's not very fun. Other writers will say the fun is in having done it, but even then there's how do you deal with the recognition, whether it's there or not, and how do you deal with failure. It's all a fucking challenge.

PLAYBOY: One of the great pleasures of reading *The Sellout* is its language. It actually seems like you're having a lot of fun, more fun than the average writer.

BEATTY: You can just do everything with language, you know what I mean? That's what keeps me charged. How does this read; really just trying to capture the sentiment that I had in my

head. I almost don't want to talk about it. That's the fun part, that's the challenging part. It all goes together.

PLAYBOY: You use so many incredible, gleefully twisted phrases and neologisms—"Afro-agrarian," "Allah ak-open bar," "languid bojangle," to name just a few—that are as thrilling as they are unsettling, and that often make you laugh and flinch at the same time. What audience did you have in mind when you were writing?

BEATTY: It's about the dissonance. The word nigger is in this. The book is about what you can do and what you can say. [*When I write*] I'm doing some calculus, but I do it with every word. It's not about what's on the page, it's about me and you having the conversation. The exegesis of the whole thing. I think there's so much fun in not understanding. I heard Marlon James say it's not his job to solve the mystery, it's his job to render the mystery. And I love that.

I think about writing to this best friend who doesn't really exist, or to this group of best friends. I just have to trust that somebody will get it. I don't want to make it easy. It's not like I'm trying to make it hard, but for me it's not easy. For me it's an age-old issue, between commercial and acceptability. I'm just trying to do what I want to do and get what I want to say out there.

PLAYBOY: What is it about the black-owned Chinese restaurant that makes it the "holy grail of racial equality"?

BEATTY: How come you can't have LeRoy's Twin Dragon? It speaks to possibilities.

PLAYBOY: At what point will you feel like you've succeeded in effecting change?

BEATTY: It's something that I write about a little bit. When I think about change, I'm one of those people who are like, "Oh, nothing ever changes." How people talk about change and progress I find really disturbing. It's like, "Obama's president and therefore the world is better." Yeah, I can't really answer that question. You get little things, like I got a letter from a kid—I'm not saying I changed him, but he was appreciative. I often think—I don't know if it's true—my books are hard to read on a couple of levels. I'm appreciative. I try to be unique and new. That's really important to me.

I was at this book event. A guy came up to me—a pretty successful writer—and he was like, "Yeah, reading you when I was younger was so helpful to me because I realized I could just be myself."

When he said that to me, that's nice. It's just that notion of, "How do I break out of this box?" There's still this notion that there's only room for one fucker. I think people really feel that, whether it's true or not. It's just, can we have a range? That's all we're asking for. The change is, the more people who are doing shit, even if I think 90 percent of it is bad, that's still good. Even in that simple way, if there's an alternative voice, or an alternative tone, I think that's good. We need these things.



Media Wunderkind Noor Tagouri Makes a Forceful Case for Modesty

BY ANNA DEL GAIZO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATE WARREN

The reporter chats
about the state of
journalism today and
her effort to break
through as the first
'hijabi' news anchor in
American TV history

For anyone with preconceived ideas about women who choose to wear a headscarf every day, Noor Tagouri is disorienting. She's simply not what you expect: a 22-year-old journalist (she likes to call herself a storyteller) on the verge of becoming this country's first hijab-wearing news anchor.

As of June, she's an on-air reporter for Newsy, where she provokes the sort of confusion we could use right now, in part by making a surprisingly bold case for modesty. As a badass activist with a passion for demanding change and asking the right questions, accompanied by beauty-ad-campaign looks, Tagouri forces us to ask ourselves why we have such a hard time wrapping our minds around a young woman who consciously covers her head and won't take no for an answer.

A West Virginia native and first-generation Libyan American, Tagouri graduated from college at the age of 20. In 2012, her #LetNoorShine campaign went viral. Her 2015 TEDx talk advocated unapologetic individuality, and her YouTube channel draws tens of thousands of viewers. More recently, she collaborated with streetwear brand

Lis'n Up Clothing on a fashion line that includes a Jean-Michel Basquiat-inspired sweatshirt. Half the purchase proceeds go to Project Futures, an anti-human-trafficking organization. Americans have a long way to go when it comes to how we regard Muslims, but with Tagouri burning down stereotypes and blazing new paths, we're a healthy stride closer.

PLAYBOY: Your goal is to become the first hijabi anchor on commercial U.S. television. What's the biggest challenge you face in your work?

TAGOURI: The biggest challenge I face as a storyteller is the process of getting people to trust you enough to tell their stories. Our society has seemingly become so desensitized to violence, abuse, death, rape and trauma. I find that people who go through these traumatic experiences have a hard time trusting reporters. Just a few days ago, I had an anonymous artist tell me he doesn't do interviews because he doesn't want reporters to "take [*his*] words and run with it".

People want to be valued and heard. Their experiences are so personal and they want their voices to come through in a story. It's a process, but building that level of trust takes time, effort and patience. I'm actually struggling with a few powerful stories right now because the people involved are still suffering. Unfortunately they're having a hard time being okay with someone sharing their story. Which is totally understandable, but it's a process.

PLAYBOY: How have you confronted that?

TAGOURI: Being able to share in the vulnerability of the people I talk to helps me gain their trust. I recently did a documentary titled *The Trouble They've Seen: The Forest Haven Story*, about one of the worst cases of institutional and medical abuse in the history of the U.S. When I decided to do the piece, I knew I needed to talk to people close to the case—someone who lived in the institution, a parent, their family members, an employee and the lawyers involved. It took a few visits with each person to get them to agree to do an interview.

To be honest, I think being a hijabi Muslim woman helped me gain that trust. I know what it's like to have the narrative of our community be skewed and exploited in the media. I was like, "Hey, I know what it's like to be misrepresented in the media. I won't do that to you. I want to tell your story because it's important and deserves justice." I know first-hand that once people

are re-empowered, they realize their own story is powerful and they begin to share. It's incredibly rewarding and can even help enlighten or save others.

PLAYBOY: How have you dealt with backlash, especially in our current political climate?

TAGOURI: If by backlash you mean hate and criticism, I don't read or pay attention to any of it. It's just negative energy and unhealthy. I make sure to keep a great circle of people around me who keep me grounded. Whether it's at work or at home, the people who have my best interest at heart voice their concerns and their critiques, and I work on them. Besides that, I just do the best I can to not worry about people who get upset because they don't like something that I wear or say.

The first story I did with Newsy was on Middle Eastern and North African Americans being considered "white" on the U.S. census and how that might change on the 2020 census. I referred to it as "White Without the Privilege." There was a ton of backlash on Facebook from people who didn't like the story. It was comical seeing people telling me to "go back home" when in fact, I was born in West Virginia. My team insisted that I never read the comments, so I stopped. The thing is, that story was based on facts. I constantly remind myself to just do the work I believe in and ignore the angry people behind computer screens.

PLAYBOY: At what point will you feel like you've succeeded in effecting change?

TAGOURI: I will have succeeded in effecting change when all girls realize they can do anything they want without having to sacrifice who they are as a person. I may dress a little different—I'm a reporter who happens to wear a headscarf and I live in my hoodie—but being a story teller, motivational speaker, entrepreneur and unapologetically myself has opened so many doors for thousands of people. I recently had a mom come up to me and tell me that her daughter is in the 6th grade and had just started wearing the hijab. She shared how a lot of the other girls tease her and put her down because of the hijab. She went on to tell me that her daughter watches all of my videos and every time she gets picked on, she pulls up my Instagram or tells them to "google Noor Tagouri and then talk to me." Those are the moments that hit me. And I always remember Maya Angelou's quote, "I come as one, but I stand as 10,000."

PLAYBOY: What is your call to action to readers?

TAGOURI: Live your life as your truest self and encourage others to do the same! Support each other. We have to live for the 10,000 who have come before us, who have made it easier for us to get to where we are today, but also for the 10,000 coming after us, so we can continue to break barriers and glass ceilings and reclaim our power. Do good, stay fearless and remember that everything you want is just outside your comfort zone.

"Being a hijabi Muslim woman helps me gain trust. I say, 'I know what it's like to be misrepresented in the media. I won't do that to you.' "

Frontwoman Laura Jane Grace Proves That the Personal Is Always Political



The punk rock trailblazer on fighting for what she believes in

BY JONAH BAYER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN LOWRY

Laura Jane Grace has been minutely scrutinized since she started the band Against Me! as an anarchist-inspired solo project in 1997. Punk purists frothed as the Gainesville, Florida group's sound evolved from lo-fi folk to full-on anthemic pop punk, leading to a major-label record deal in 2007. (These days, the band releases music on its own Total Treble imprint.) Fans and critics stopped and stared when Grace came out as transgender in 2012—an event with few precedents in the testosterone-drenched world of punk rock. This November, two months after the release of the seventh Against Me! album, *Shape Shift With Me*, Grace will cap off her odyssey so far with a memoir titled *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout*.

Back in May, Grace made headlines for burning her birth certificate onstage in North Carolina to protest the state's anti-trans bathroom law. But her music and writing signal a more intimate strain of activism: Listening to Against Me! songs such as “I Was a Teenage Anarchist” and “True Trans Soul Rebel,” it becomes clear that Grace has always lived where the personal and the political collide. Her painfully honest, deeply human way of articulating that friction is the definition of Grace. And she still believes in the scene that has sustained her, even as it has threatened to drown her in expectations. “The influence that punk rock has had on my life is astounding,” she says. “I just think music is infinitely important.”

PLAYBOY: What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your career?

LJG: That's a good soft one to start out with. [Laughs] Well, I don't know if it's clichéd or whatever, but the challenge is longevity. It's your biggest hurdle to keep it all together, whether that's keeping a band together or even keeping your emotional state together, to continually remember that the reason you do what you do is because you love playing music and not become bitter or jaded. That's not an easy thing to do, you know? It's not an easy thing to be a band for 20 years by any means.

PLAYBOY: How do you think you've managed to keep it together for so long?

LJG: You just have to work for it; it has to be worth it for you fight for. I've spent a lot of time wondering, going through my second divorce, if I'm able to be in a committed relationship, and when I asked myself that question I'm always like, I've been committed to James [Bowman, guitarist in Against Me!] and committed to doing this band, so I know I have that ability. But just like a marriage, you have to really be willing to sacrifice.

PLAYBOY: How do you deal with backlash, which you've dealt with since day one with this band?

LJG: Right, and I think there's been times where I've dealt with it poorly and times where I've been able to manage it. I'm thankful for those experiences because I think it has given me good perspective—not just on

backlash, but on praise, too. You just have to take it all with a grain of salt. It's nice when people say good things about you, but it means just as much as when people say bad things about you, and that shouldn't determine why you do something or what you get out of something or whether or not it's successful to you.

PLAYBOY: Especially in punk. People can get worked up about a band signing to a label or something like that and then you get a little older and wonder what you were so mad about.

LJG: [Laughs] But it all seemed so important at the time.

PLAYBOY: Exactly.

LJG: I've been that way with bands. I know that some of the time that's just being young, and some of the time that's something just meaning so much to you at a time in your life and fearing change. But change is inevitable.

PLAYBOY: For so long you were under the microscope as far as signing to a big indie and then a major, and it seems like once you came out, that other stuff became way less of a big deal.

LJG: I like to hope that when I came out it gave people some sense that the decisions I made were decisions I made because that's the way I thought and felt about what I had to do to survive. Those weren't always things that I felt like I could or even wanted to explain to other people, and that just comes back to being certain why you're doing something—thinking for yourself and making your own decisions, not being influenced by what others expect from you. And being prepared that sometimes you'll disappoint people or sometimes people are not going to get it, but in order to survive you have to be confident in yourself.

PLAYBOY: Burning your birth certificate onstage was a very tangible example of someone really standing behind her beliefs.

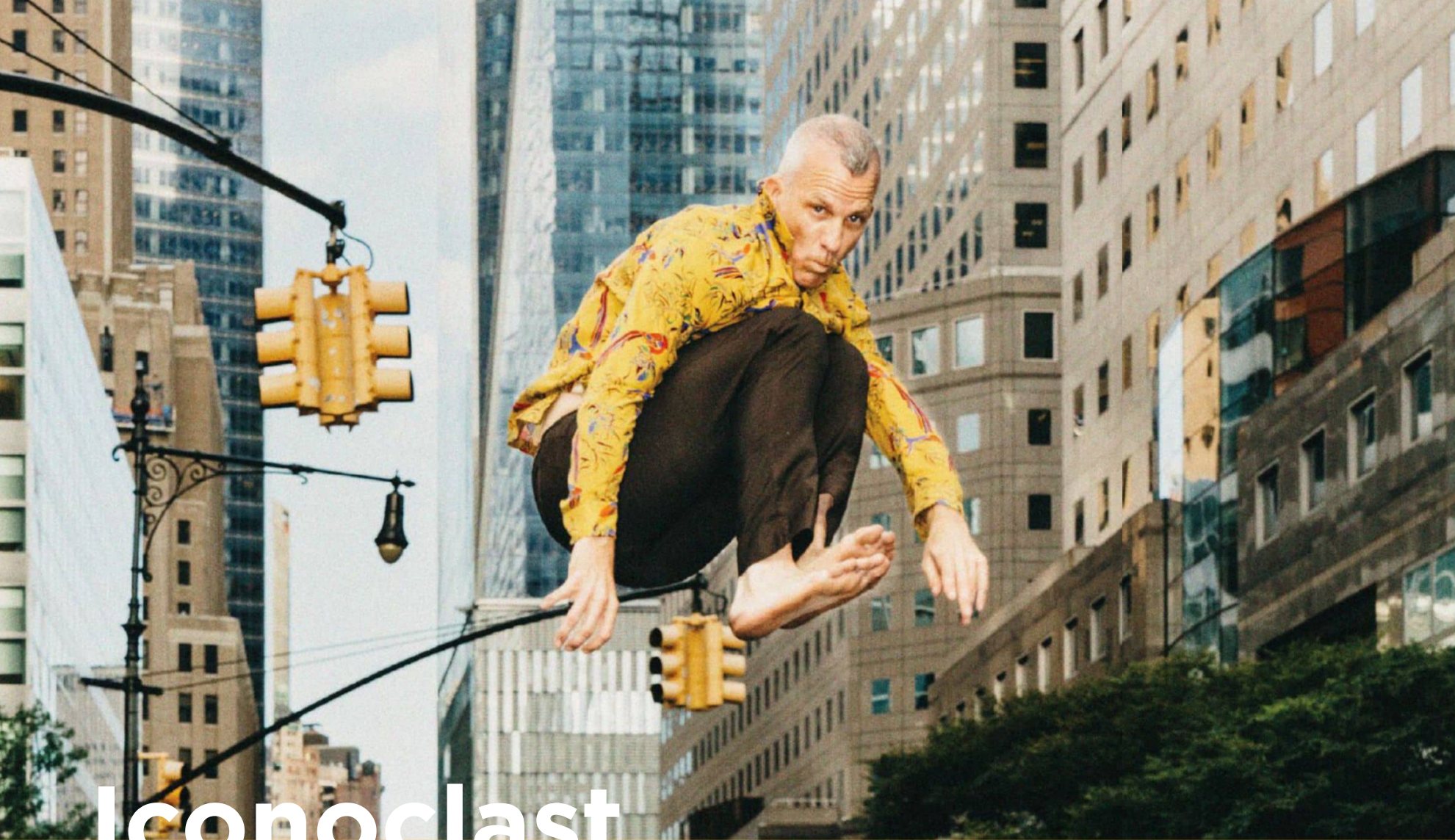
LJG: You have to walk the talk, you know? For me, I don't have a separation in my life in what I do with the band and a home life. I mean, it's not like I change into a different person or suddenly start thinking about things differently when I'm in show mode versus when I'm at home mode. It all has to be an extension of your life, and the way you approach making music should be the way you approach living your life, you know?

PLAYBOY: How would you say your new book figures into everything you've said here? Is it scary or exciting waiting for it to come out?

LJG: It's both a relief and totally fucking terrifying, you know? I try to be really polite when people come up to me and say they're excited to read my book. I'm like, “Thank you, thank you, awesome, yeah,” but inside I'm thinking Oh god, I'm so scared of people reading my book.

PLAYBOY: I'm sure you've changed so many people's perspectives by putting this stuff out there, even if they don't tell you about it personally.

LJG: Sure. But the moments when people do personally tell you—that really does mean a lot.



Iconoclast Jason Dill Is Returning Skateboarding to Its Obscenely Awesome Roots

The famed skater chats about his near-death experience, redefining the skate shop business and his role on Netflix's *Love*

BY **ROBERT BRINK**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**

In 2009, pro skateboarder Jason Dill had to call 911 on himself. He was throwing up blood all over his New York City apartment and suffering from a gastric hemorrhage. The Jameson, Vicodin and Percocet cocktails had finally taken their toll.

"I didn't think I'd even survive," says Dill, who now stars on the Netflix series *Love*. "When I'm on the set, I'm quiet as a mouse. I'm just so blown away and thankful I'm there. And the last thing I ever wanted was the responsibility of owning a company that people expect more from—because owning a company is a pain in the ass."

In 2013, after kicking the pills and spending more time on his board, Dill ditched his longtime sponsor, Alien Workshop—one of the most popular skateboarding companies ever—and walked away from

a partial-ownership offer to co-found board brand Fucking Awesome, an extension of his self-funded apparel side project.

In doing so, Dill dumped a bucket of ice on the once-countercultural world of skateboarding, which in the previous 17 years had devolved into a G-rated parody of itself to appease moms and malls, and woke it the fuck up. The exodus of Alien's riders to Fucking Awesome was swift. It's now one of the top-selling and most knocked-off companies in boards and streetwear, despite its provocative graphics, null social media presence and label that prevents mass retail saturation.

PLAYBOY: When Fucking Awesome launched as a skateboard brand in 2013, it wasn't uncommon to hear industry folk say, "They're never going to make it. They'll never get into mall shops with that name."

DILL: You see where their brains went immediately? That's what's wrong with the industry—all this bullshit people talk. I'm sorry because some of them are my friends, but with their two-and-a-half car garage and two and a half kids in their suburb of Portland, of course they're not going to be like, "Let's go nuts!" They'd lose their fucking jobs. Luckily, I'm not fighting to keep my two and a half kids in the latest expensive daycare. I don't give a fuck. No family, no car and no mortgage payments means I just shoot this shit out of my fucking soul.

PLAYBOY: Die-hards have criticized the skateboarding industry for pandering to the mainstream so much and becoming so non-offensive that a word like "fucking" seems shocking. That's what's so scary. If it were 1993, no one would bat an eye. You disrupted the entire industry.

DILL: I'd be lying if I said I wasn't pleased that things were disrupted, because I am. I most certainly wasn't aiming for Alien Workshop to almost go out of business, because after being with them for 15 years, quitting was emotionally insane. But going into skate shops these days, looking at the wall and seeing other board brands trying really hard is great, because none of them were trying this hard before and I know that's a direct result of FA. Anyone who thinks that statement is over the top, go ahead and think that but you can also eat my butt, because it's the truth. I see people bite us over and over again and it's ridiculous because they don't even realize everything they bite. That forces me to go make something else that's out of their realm because I know they won't think of it. And then they bite that, too.

When I visit skate shops like Uprise in Chicago, Seasons in Albany, Orchard in Boston or Exit in Philadelphia, owners tell me that I helped bring skate shops back. They feel FA brought the kids and excitement back because new kids started coming in only asking for FA. Shit like that is such a big compliment that I feel funny saying it back to you.

PLAYBOY: After you were hospitalized in 2009, you kind of disappeared from skateboarding. In your own mind, did you ever imagine owning a respected company like FA?

DILL: No. It's totally fucking insane. That's why when I'm on the set of *Love* I take it all in. I'm just so fucking blown away. I didn't think I'd survive. I really didn't. I never wanted my own company. Wanna know why? Be-

cause it's a fucking pain in the ass! When people expect more, they expect it fucking tomorrow. If you came out with some shit yesterday, they wanna see the new shit next week. It's just ridiculous day in and day out, but I suppose it's like having a kid. I take care of it. I love it. I can't let it go to a community college, you know? I gotta raise it right. *[laughs]*

PLAYBOY: Skateboarding is a trend-oriented sport. Things are hot for a year or three and then they're not. We've all seen the shelf life some skate brands have.

DILL: I'm now past my third year of FA. I'm proud of what we've done. If you are a company making stuff, you need to have it in the back of your head that, hey, I might have to kill this thing one day for the greater good so it doesn't look like a bunch of bullshit. Imagine if Mark Gonzales got to end his skate company, Blind. How would we look at it today? Imagine if Mark had made some deal with Steve Rocco, the owner of his distributor early on, like, "I'll totally do this, but when I think it's time that this is done, I get to put out an ad that says, 'It's done. We killed it. It's over. Thank you.'" I feel a lot of people think when you start a company, you just ride it until someone comes along and buys you. That's not the fucking case here. I'd rather it die than look bad.

PLAYBOY: Killed at the peak.

Yeah, like Michael Jordan did, until he played baseball and came back and played for the fucking Wizards. It was like, c'mon, dude! I know I didn't invent this way of thinking, but I feel it serves me best.

PLAYBOY: You also star on Judd Apatow's hit Netflix series, *Love*. How did that come about?

About a year and a half ago I was in Los Angeles and saw my friend [TV writer] Lesley Arfin on the street. She was like, "Hey, I'm making this television show with my boyfriend and we think you'd be good in it." I was at point when I really needed everything to be completely spot-on with FA—production and all that bullshit—so I was like, "I'm not really into it. That sounds crazy. I don't think I have time." She told me, "I knew you'd say that, but it's Judd Apatow and it's guaranteed two seasons for Netflix. Will you audition?"

And I fucking did. Before I knew it they were asking me to come to Sony Pictures and do a reading in front of Judd. I was so fucking nervous. It was wild because I'm not an actor.

The second season's done now and I'm happy to be on it. Everyone was really nice. All of them knowing I wasn't an actor coming into it was just super cool because I'd do a scene with a stand-up comedian and they'd be like, "Dude you're doing good." I'm like, "Really? All right. Good."

Indie Developer **Sean Murray**

**Boldly Goes Where
No Gamer Has
Gone Before**

Will leaving a big-studio gig to follow his passion and create a new type of gameplay pay off?

BY **MIKE ROUGEAU**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAVID TITLOW**



Everyone dreams of being an astronaut; Sean Murray made a game that lets you play one. This summer, the 36-year-old's company, Hello Games, released one of the most ambitious video games in recent history: No Man's Sky. The gorgeous sci-fi adventure allows players to explore more than 18 quintillion planets—yes, quintillion—thanks to clever environment-generation technology. Travel to massive worlds suffused with rich colors and teeming with alien creatures—then dodge galactic cops in your spacecraft.

The Ireland-born, Australian outback-raised Murray created his first game when he was just five. “My parents always joke that this is all I ever wanted to do,” he says.

Murray founded Hello Games in 2008 with three friends after quitting his job at Criterion, a big studio that got bought by EA, an even bigger studio. Sick of slaving away on blockbusters such as the Burnout series, he wanted to flex his creative muscles. Today that's not a unique origin story for an independent game developer, but back then, in the days before the Apple App Store, it was.

“We were some of the first people to do that,” he says. “In our minds, it wasn't some path to success. It was more like, I can't work here anymore, and I need to go do something different.”

No Man's Sky, the third release from Hello Games, launched in August after three years of feverish buildup among gamers obsessed with the promise of endless exploration. It's a high-water mark for video games—and like a true artist, that's all Murray really cares about. PLAYBOY spoke with Murray just before the U.S. launch of No Man's Sky; here's what he had to say about setting out to make an impact, dealing with fan backlash and exactly what makes Hello Games successful.

PLAYBOY: You set out to make something that you felt would have a greater impact than your earlier games.

MURRAY: Yes. This is hard to describe: You're having this kind of midlife crisis, and you're not actually thinking, “Oh my God, this is going to blow people away.” What you're thinking is like, “I don't know whether I'm a good programmer. I don't know whether I would actually be capable of doing something like really different.” You know, it's like challenging yourself. I wasn't thinking, “This will be some crazy like commercial success” or “This will be some big hit with people.” I was thinking, “I want to do something really cool that I'm excited about,” you know? And that was what drove it.

We actually, when three of us, the three others joined me and we like sat in that room, the pitch to everyone was like: We have just spent a few years making Joe Danger and we made some money from that, and we have to take that money and get it out of us—like do something crazy and burn through this and not worry about ever having commercial success or whatever. Let's just do something that we really enjoy for the next year and see what we get to.

PLAYBOY: I don't know how often you go on the subreddit—hopefully not that often because those people are crazy. I think anything that builds to this level, it's inevitable that there is going to be some backlash, and No Man's Sky is no exception. How do you guys deal with that aspect of it?

MURRAY: [Laughs] Yeah, it's a tough one. There's a thing in video games, I think more than any medium, where this is excitement, and excitement's really good, but for some reason, for some people, that turns into hype, which is a kind of an unrealistic, intangible level of excitement kind of thing where it's unattainable. I am always nervous and

"I am always nervous and terrified about people getting hyped about our game."

terrified about people getting hyped about our game. I definitely have always tried to just show great gameplay, stand on stage at E3 and just play the game and be reasonably open and honest about what the game is or what we're doing, you know, and be open as a studio. And when the game comes out, yeah, there will inevitably be a backlash of some sort, because some people have been waiting for like three years! And it's actually really hard to wait for anything for three years and feel like justified. You want it to be perfect, you know?

And you'll have seen that around lots of good games. Destiny had loads of hype around it, and then it was actually when it came out it mildly disappointed people, which I really didn't understand. But two years later, I'm still playing Destiny and all my friends are still playing Destiny. It does happen, you know, and it's kind of an unfortunate side effect of the fact that people who like video games fucking love video games, you know?

PLAYBOY: You weather whatever comes and then the people who are still around are the ones who like it, right? So you get that positive community ultimately.

MURRAY: Right. There is that for sure, but there's also a thing—and this is really weird. Nobody on Reddit will understand this, or on Neogaf or any of those places, right, but we do play tests every now and then where it'll all be anonymous and it'll be NDA'd and we will get people in to play our game. And it will just be like, 20 people at random from people who are buying games at game stores. We just pick people at random and get them in to play the game. Of those 20 people we will be lucky if one of them has heard of No Man's Sky, and that's happened like, time and time again.

And everyone forgets that. No one realizes that the majority of people who buy games, they don't necessarily go on game websites, and the thing that is amazing for me is to watch these people play the game, and they play for three hours, say, and they think they're playing what in their mind is a sort of survival sandbox game where they're trying to repair a spaceship, and they do that, and then they get in that spaceship, and they take off from that planet. And they were never expecting that to happen. It blows their mind! [laughs] And there's that priceless reaction where they're turning each other around like, “What's going on?!” We make the game for them as much as for anyone, you know?

PLAYBOY: If you were going to try to be less humble, what would you say that you guys have done to get you here?

MURRAY: We just put aside being afraid of failing, I think. At every point, when we had to make a decision, we would talk about that decision and somebody would point out something being risky or having not been done before or being problematic, and it's become almost a joke within the group: As soon as somebody points that out, that is the thing we're going to go and do. As soon as somebody says, “We can't possibly get it ready for that date,” it's like, “Oh no. Well, you've said it now. The challenge has been laid down and now we have to



do that.” [laughs]

And I know that sounds cheesy, but that is—we had already achieved like I would say mild success [with Joe Danger], and it just felt kind of empty and kind of like a failure. And we were like, I would rather kind of be an actual proper failure or properly do something different than how this feels right now. I don't want this to be our normality.

PLAYBOY: You didn't think you'd peaked.

MURRAY: Yeah, like I thought—I can tell you what I thought. When I was a kid, what made me want to get into games was reading about a guy called John Carmack, who worked at id, who'd done Quake and stuff like that. And I like, I saw him as like a great programmer, right? And it would have been my dream to work in games, but I hadn't thought I'd be good enough to do that; I thought it was only for like, for gods like John Carmack, you know? I didn't even apply for jobs for ages. And then I did, and I got a job, and I felt like an impostor. “I'm not good enough to work here,” or whatever. And then as I did, I felt like I fit in OK kind of thing. But I just felt like, “I don't feel like I've done anything.” I'd worked on a bunch of games and they've done alright and stuff like that, but it didn't feel like I'd done anything really impactful or really worthwhile. You reach that point where you question whether you were ever going to do anything like that, you know?

PLAYBOY: So what is the next goal?

MURRAY: I know this sounds weird again, but we'd have made this game because we have been—and this is the thing most people don't realize, because we've self-funded it. I think most people would assume that because No Man's Sky is a thing that most people know about, I guess, or that some, within the gaming industry people know about, you would assume that Hello Games is already in some way “well off” or well-funded or has grown. We haven't! We're still really

small, we're self-funded, and we're really constrained.

There's so many things that have been positive that have come from that, because we've had to make really clever decisions, but there's so many things where you're like [sighing] you know, I wish we could have done this, this or this to a way higher standard. And there is a shot, if the community doesn't go too crazy when it comes out, that hopefully we're going to be able to work with them and talk to them, and everyone's going to keep their heads and we're going to continue to update the game and make it approach the higher standard that I'd really like.

But like, aside from that, what's going on in the back of my head is if we weren't on this shoestring budget, if we weren't this tiny, tiny super constrained team, if we just had a little bit more, just let me show you what we could do. Every other studio with like 400 people, and just like, 12 or 15 of us. For every one of us, they have our whole team size again. And like if we only had half of that, if we had a quarter, an eighth, there's so many cool things we could have done.

PLAYBOY: Do you have a call to action for fans or players or anyone reading this? What would you say to people? What can they do?

MURRAY: We all just play and buy the same kind of triple-A first-person shooter every year or whatever, and that's cool, you know, that should exist for sure. But there's so much more that games can be than that, and there's so much more to get excited about. And right now publishers think that that is all that people want, and they think that the average player is actually like probably not the most refined and intelligent and well-rounded person. But I actually think, when I get to game shows, there's people from wide backgrounds who are really interesting. And them getting excited about things that are a bit different—that is the most powerful thing in the games industry.

PLAYBOY: Yeah, more of that. More No Man's Sky.

MURRAY: [Laughs] No Man's Sky 2, here we come.

Artist in Residence: **Chloé Kovska**

Familiar characters are
reimagined as libidinous
cartoons in the cheeky
world of Chloé Kovska

WRITTEN BY JEAN ANDRÉ



I've had a crush on Chloé Kovska's work since I first spotted it on Instagram a few years ago. That delightful riot of bubble butts, red devils and Playboy Rabbit Heads nestled deep into my brain, where my inner child waits impatiently for me to go senile. Kovska has the ability to reduce forms to the essential, paying tribute to the American tattoo tradition and Golden Age comics and cartoons while adding her own primal twist. It's as though Tex Avery, Sailor Jerry and Robert Crumb got together and hosted an orgy at the Playboy Mansion. In her words, "I paint desires, urges, dreams, inspirations and memories with lovers, dressed up in cartoons."

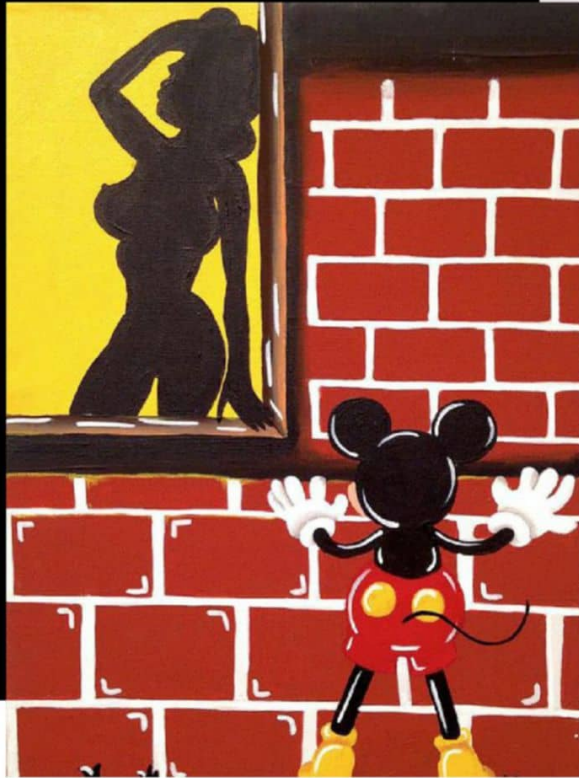
I learned that Kovska grew up in Melbourne, Australia, where her father taught her to paint. She has shown

her artwork in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Miami, but she mostly keeps to herself, preferring that the details of her life remain obscure. She likes to use canvas or cardboard and acrylic paint, which dries more quickly than oil and keeps colors bright—all the better to bring her kinky, trippy pop-cartoon visions to life.

I contacted her to get a piece to hang above my desk and another to be tattooed on my arm. I have tried not to fall in love with her, but it's hard: Aside from her gifts as an artist, Kovska is as sweet and beautiful as you would imagine. Ultimately, I prefer to sit in the audience, like Avery's Big Bad Wolf, my eyes bursting out of my head at Chloé Kovska's pink panthers, gorgeous goddesses and red-hot riding hoods.



Playtime. Acrylic and gesso on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2016.



As Quiet as a Mouse.... Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 14 inches, 2014.



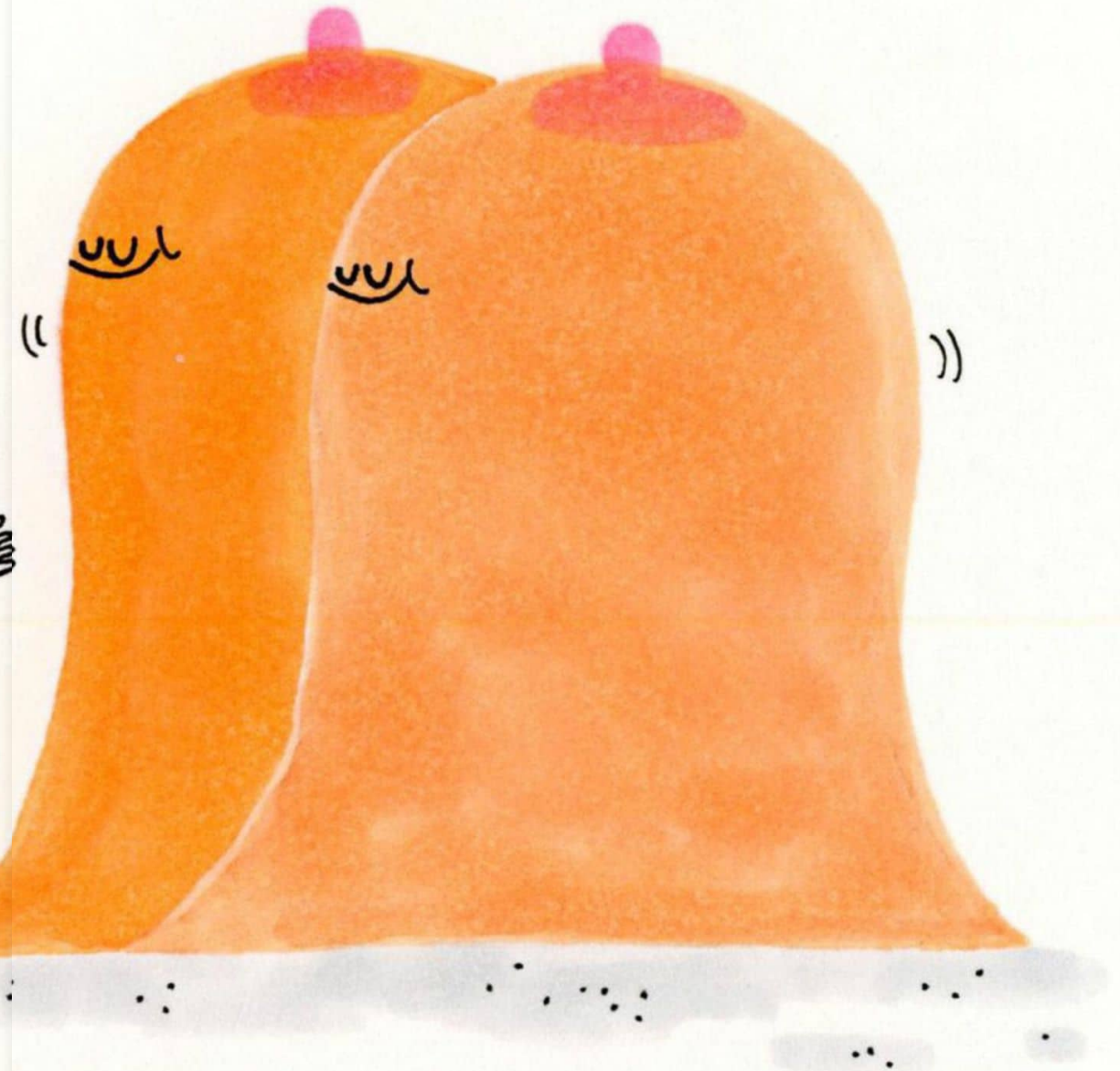
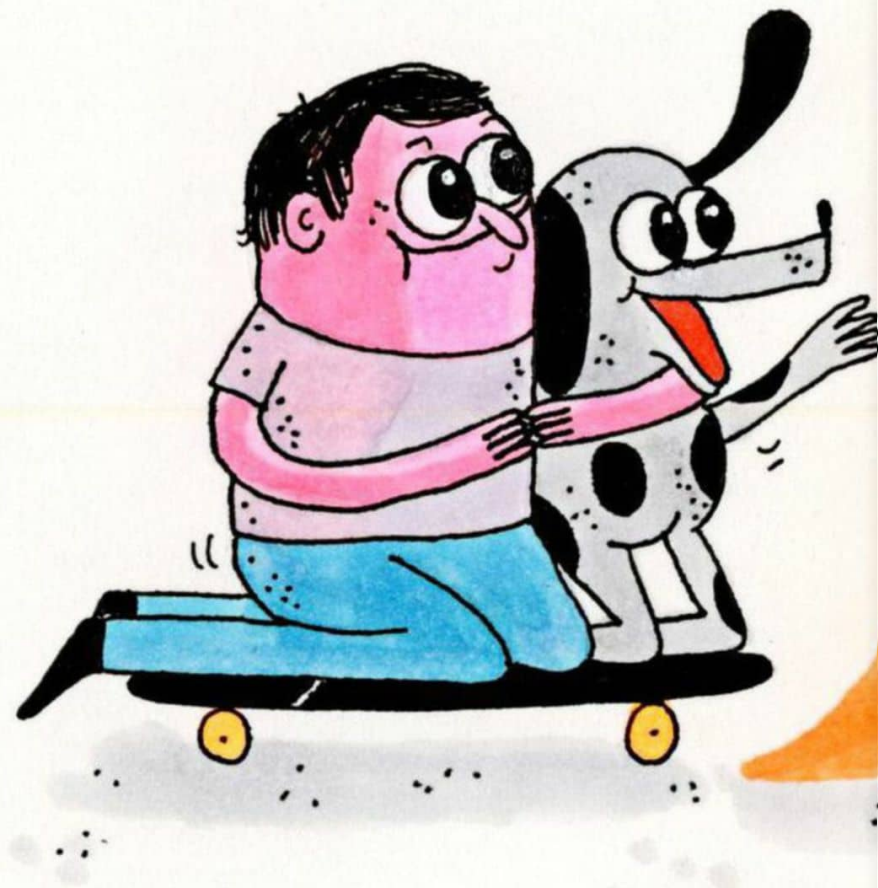
Inspired by '76. Acrylic and gesso on canvas, 18 x 14 inches, 2016.



Sex Wolf. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2014.



Pink Panther and Little Dot, Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20 inches, 2014.



Artist in **Residence:** **Jay Howell**

Familiar characters are
reimagined as libidinous
cartoons in the cheeky
world of Chloé Kovska

WRITTEN BY **SHEA ADAMS**

Jay Howell
Los Angeles
California

Long before he designed the main characters on the Fox cartoon series Bob's Burgers or co-created Nickelodeon's Sanjay and Craig, Jay Howell liked to draw his lanky bug-eyed figures onto the pages of found magazines (like PLAYBOY) and free-bin erotic novels. "It kind of satisfied my sick desire to feel like I'd accomplished something bigger," he says. "It's like, Hey, I'm part of the magazine now!" In addition to showing his work up and down the coast and illustrating skateboard decks for Consolidated and for Creature, the Bay Area native is probably the only artist with both Vans and Gucci collaborations under his belt. And now that the self-described "posh spaz" is our inaugural Artist in Residence, Howell's dream of appearing in the magazine has actually come true. He tells us

he loves to "get high and fly first class" with a playboy in hand, and he excitedly describes how the great Shel Silverstein, having served as head cartoonist here in the 1950s and 1960s, traveled the globe as a sort of illustrator-journalist for the magazine. "I mean, imagine that. That's so fun!" Clearly the two artists have a connection beyond the Rabbit banner: Their work just feels good. "I try to be in a good mood constantly, so yeah, I'm a hippie," Howell says, adding, "but I also own guns and love to drive fast cars."





ISRAEL CASSOL

Instagram @israel.cassol



Israel Cassol, born in Caxias do Sul, Brazil, is a model and fashionista considered the biggest collector of the Hermes brand Birkin bags in the United Kingdom. His collection is valued at approximately EUR120,000 and has featured in several tabloids around the world. He has just made history by being the first Brazilian man to pose for an issue of Playboy. Owner of more than 13 Birkins, Israel promotes androgynous fashion on social media and defends genderless fashion. As well as being an activist, he also fights for environmental causes and has made several iconic photo essays honouring nature. An example of this was a VOGUE spotlight wearing a mask skirt. Investing in his career as a presenter, he managed to fulfill his dream of having his own television show in Brazil, on one of the largest open TV channels in the country. There he interviews London and Brazilian personalities, shows culture, fashion and lifestyle unfolding in various subjects. Overseas model and actor since the age of 21, Israel is also known for starring in two LGBTQ+ films in the UK, namely: The Cost of Love (2011) and Seeing Heaven (2010).

Israel is also known as a spokesperson for the men's health issue of andropause. Little publicised, he made a point of reporting his health experience and warning other men. His report was featured in media around the world.

Photography by **Glauber Bassi** | @glauberbassi
MUA **Hicaro Thales** | @hicarothalesmake
PR **LA Media Group** | @la.mediagroup
Stylist **Fazzioli** | @fazziolijohn





Israel, we're happy to have you on the cover of Playboy, what does the Playboy brand represent to you?

Playboy is one of the best-selling magazines in the world and to have me as the first Brazilian gay man on the cover is an honour. Representing my LGBTQ+ community is important to me and it's a big responsibility too. It is great to see that Playboy is changing with society, it's fantastic for the magazine. Playboy is making my name history and it's a dream come through. Furthermore, I would like to inspire people to follow their dreams because to be on the cover is a dream come true

We love your creativity and bold work, more so the message behind it, can you tell us a bit more about what drives you, where it all comes from?

Since I was young, I was suffering as a gay boy with bullying at school and I believe that every gay man at some point in his life suffers like I did. To express myself with my clothes makes me feel very confident in my own skin. Modelling helped me to be comfortable with my own beauty and strengths. When I started working as an influencer, I wanted to work on issues that our planet is facing. So then, I started developing clothes that could call attention to environmental issues. Fashion has this power in society, but people have the power too to change the world

So much passion and humility all in one package, we love it! Let's talk about the bags, what is the story behind these?

I was looking for a bag to travel with in 2015 but I couldn't find any bags that I liked. So, I saw in a magazine a Birkin Bag. I was in love straight away, but I didn't know quite how hard it was going to be to get my hands on it. Everybody knows it is not easy to get these bags. Fortunately, I did have a contact in Milan who helped me to get my first Birkin Bag. After that trip, I started to collect them. They are my lovers and I really enjoy carrying them around. It's very powerful for me as a male to carry a female bag.

I really want to empower men that they can carry female bags or wear female clothes, whenever they feel like without people's judgment. We are in the 21st century and genderless is here to stay.

Your message is a powerful and strong one and we are sure there is an equally powerful story behind it all, what are some of the challenges you have faced breaking out into the industry as a male model?

In the beginning, it wasn't easy for me. I left Brazil when I was 21 years old to work in Milan as a model. I didn't speak English or Italian at all. But I

a gay model was hard sometimes because some people take advantage of us, particularly when you are young. However, I was strong enough to be focussed and never gave up on the work. I always have in mind what I want to achieve, and I am almost there in 2022. Thank you, God!

What is a typical day like in the life of Israel?

Well, I wake up around 7:30am. I have my green juice first and my breakfast with bananas, protein and some oats to start my day. Around 11am I have my PT session and 12pm is my lunchtime. Always focus on healthy foods. Love reading books, particularly stories about the 18th and 19th century. And I can't finish my day without my afternoon tea which I learned about with my British husband Rupert. Also, I like to include my daily rituals such as meditations, rituals or theta healing. Love going out for dinners with family and friends. That's one of my normal days (when I'm not working).

What are some of the highlights of your career?

I think the day I arrived in Milan was a great moment. It was the first opportunity I had in life to drive myself to achieve my big dream. Working as an actor was a great experience too. But my biggest pleasure was when I started recording for the show Empire Style on Band TV MG in 2020. Of course, being on a cover of Playboy is now another highlight of my career.

What's on the cards for you this 2022?

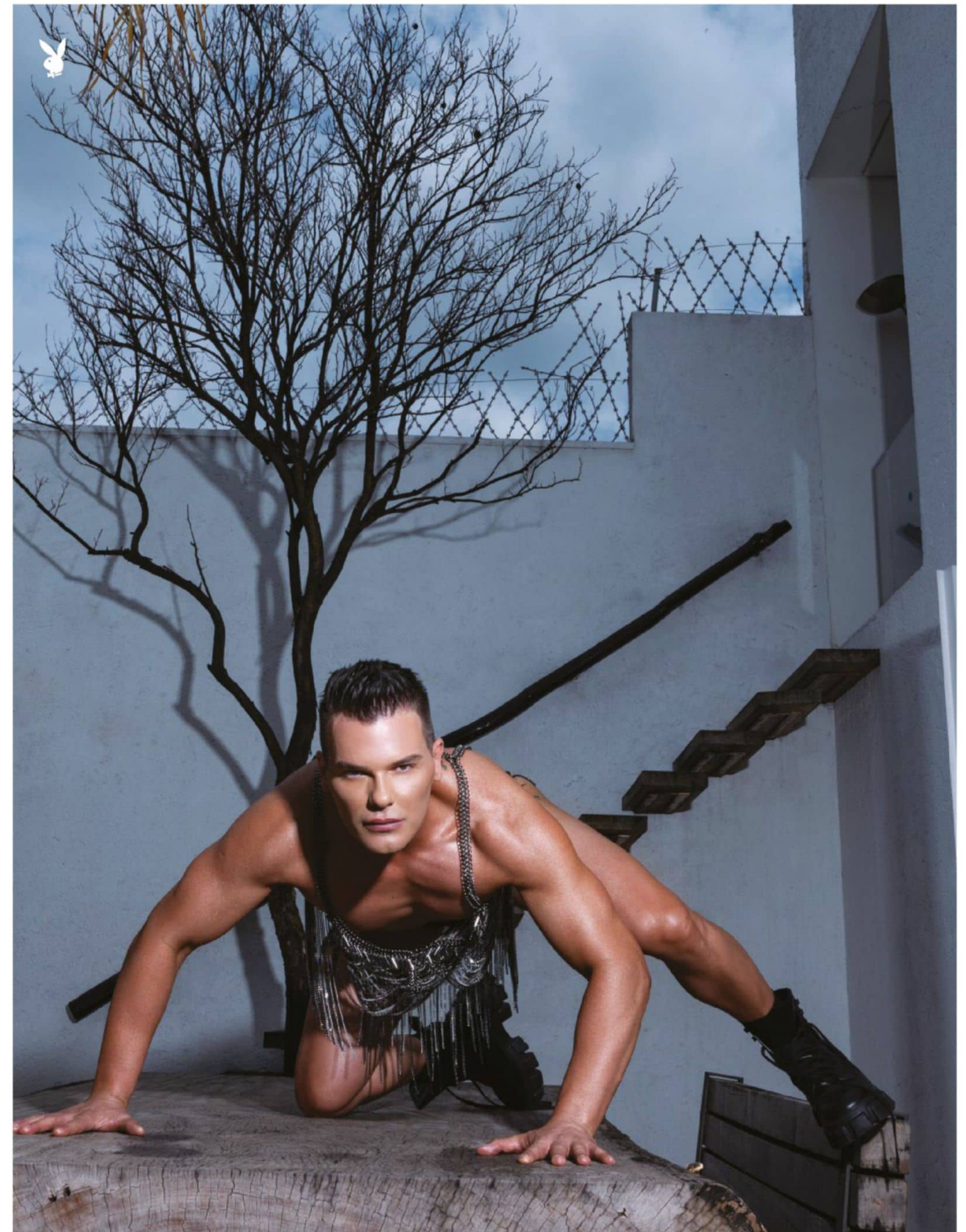
I have lots of things I want to do this year. Perhaps, my own show is a big dream. It will happen, I am sure. I would love to appear in a reality show and show my personality and outfits. I would like to continue my work with actions to call attention to environmental issues and empower more genderless fashion on my social media. I will continue my TV show which expresses myself and continue my





messages to inspire people to follow their dreams.

It's been an absolute pleasure catching up with you Israel, any last words for our readers out there? I would like to leave a message for the LGBTQ+. I would like to tell you that you must find help to identify your fears, your traumas and find a way to overcome these issues and accept yourself as you are. Always follow your dreams and never give up. There are lots of obstacles which it's necessary to overcome in our lives and help us grow. Be grateful for everything you have in your life. Be yourself, be focussed, work hard so you will achieve all your dreams, and always believe in a powerful energy which some people call God, and others energy from the universe. Big kisses. IC.





Changing the World With Your Wallet



The way we spend our money is a daily weapon for reform. Here, America's most renowned consumer advocate makes the case for direct citizen action

BY RALPH NADER

Speaking before college audiences, I often ask, "How many of you have never been to a McDonald's or a Walmart?" No hands go up—except mine. I explain that I've never given my consumer dollars to McDonald's because of its deadly menu of fat, sugar and salt that has increased youth obesity for two generations. I've similarly refused to give my money to Walmart because of its low wages and unfair competitive practices that crush small businesses.

If you're concerned about the impact your money has on the world after it leaves your pocket, you need to define your consumer preferences. In an internet age it's easy to research brands to see if you agree with their positions on political candidates and their stands on diversity and nondiscrimination. But rarely do enough consumers vote with their dollars to send a clear and convincing message to companies that need to change.

Why? First, it can be difficult. Wells Fargo, the regulation-resisting bank with about 5,800 branches, was finally exposed after two recent crimes: Over the course of 2016 and 2017 it was discovered that the financial institution had created up to 3.5 million fake accounts and made unnecessary auto-insurance purchases for more than 800,000 unknowing customers. The media reported the details of these crimes extensively. The bank had to pay millions of dollars in restitution and fines, regulators put a temporary moratorium on its capital expansion, and the bosses stepped down, ample pay packages in hand. But what the bank's directors feared most was loss of customers and an enduring stock-price collapse. That didn't happen—because as everybody knows, switching banks is complicated, inconvenient and time-consuming.

Second, consumers may have limited options. If you have a small income or live in a rural area with few if any alternatives to Walmart and Amazon, it's difficult to leverage your consumer dollars for better business practices.

And then there are the subtler methods practiced by tech giants such as Facebook and Google. When a company gives you something for free, you become the product. Information about your private life is central to the business model of these giant internet companies. You're unlikely to simply say "I want out" of your social networks after learning that Facebook has shared your personal data with everyone who wants it anywhere in the world. But when you click "accept" on those encyclopedic terms and conditions, you lose control of your online privacy, and your data profile grows by the day.

Our government, heavily lobbied by Silicon Valley, will not require Facebook to provide an opt-in button. To opt out from Facebook and its ilk requires willpower. When news broke that the social network had allowed unsavory companies to obtain information about tens of millions of its customers, hundreds of thousands of them closed their accounts. This protest hardly made a dent. Facebook still has more than 2 billion users worldwide, including more than half the U.S. population. But Mr. Zuckerberg definitely felt the cautionary tremors.

Another difficulty is presented by the right-wing and very politically active Koch brothers. Together they're worth more than \$1,850.00 billion, mainly from giant oil, gas and chemical enterprises. They lobby for corporation-friendly judges and against even minimal taxation. But they have no recognizable logo or brand presence at the retail level.

What can you do? First, educate yourself. It's easy to find out which companies belong to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

"Even a small portion of that dollar power could be used to advance our country's health, safety and moral strength."

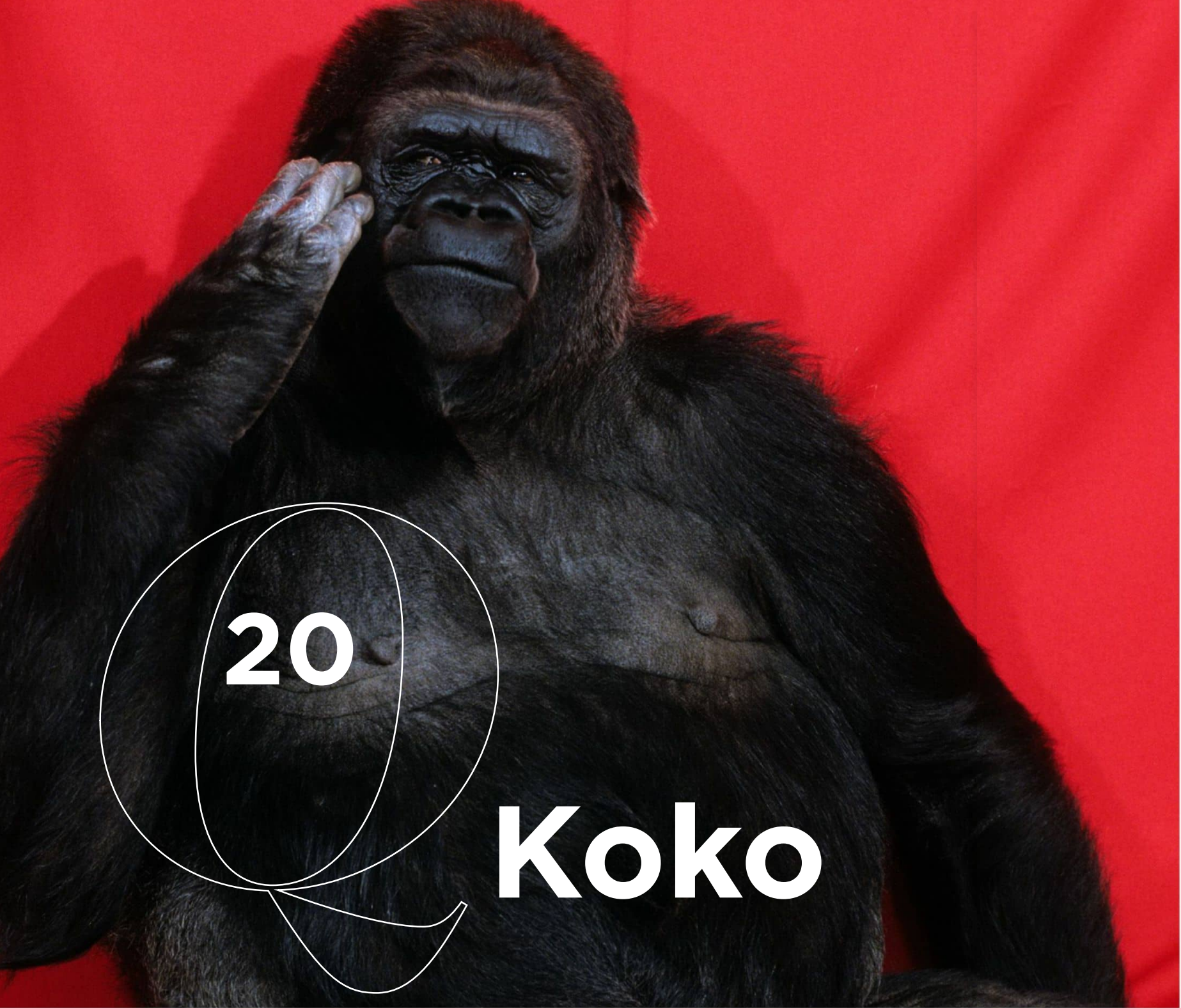
or other trade associations that push for weaker environmental standards, higher drug prices, more tax escapes for big businesses or tort restrictions that weaken access to our courts by wrongfully injured persons. This will expose companies with no visible consumer brand or identity.

Sleeping Giants is a Twitter account that informs advertisers of consumers' disdain for companies or news sites that fail to oppose bigotry, racism, sexism and hate-mongering. This public outing of abusers has caused thousands of companies to cancel their advertising contracts for fear of being accused of supporting media outlets or personalities—such as Fox's Bill O'Reilly—whose behavior contradicts customer values or corporate policies. This collateral pressure works (though at times, like all mass movements, it can go to extremes).

You can be a "pick and choose" consumer based on your political values without sacrificing a good deal. I know people who won't buy gas from ExxonMobil because of the company's long-standing cover-up of and resistance to regulations dealing with climate disinformation. Years ago, consumers troubled by Philip Morris's control of congressional politicians and promotion of smoking refused to purchase products from the company's food subsidiaries. And when it comes to environmental malefactors like the Koch brothers, consumers can penalize them—and help themselves and the planet at the same time—by practicing energy conservation. Solar panels and products made from renewable resources are good places to start.

However, it's worth adding that consumers don't have to open their wallets for corporations to change practices. Notice how many powerful executives were immediately dismissed after facing credible accusations of sexual harassment, assault and rape. Companies ranging from Fox News to Morgan Stanley couldn't ignore the waves of condemnation from consumers, workers and citizen action groups. Reporting by the mass media helped accelerate the process.

Remember, consumer spending accounts for more than two thirds of our economy. Even a small portion of that dollar power could be used to advance our country's health, safety and moral strength. Protest with your spending choices.



Koko is the most celebrated gorilla in the world, and for good reason. She is the first gorilla that can use a human language. Dr. Penny Patterson has been her teacher since Koko’s birth and is the director of The Gorilla Foundation in Woodside, California, where Koko now lives.

Robert Crane interviewed Koko, with Dr. Patterson acting as interpreter. He reports, “Koko, 15 years old and 230 pounds, sat poised and ready in her open-air living area. She looked me in the eye and, using American Sign Language, commanded, ‘Show me your teeth,’ which I respectfully did. She was delighted by the enormous amount of gold and silver in my mouth. Her mate, Michael, 13 and 350 pounds, who shares quarters with her, never looked me in the eye—something to do with the fact that I was a stranger and a male.

”Koko and Michael, who have an occasional spat, are, for the most part, nonaggressive. They are the subjects of an ongoing study by the foundation’s research team. Both gorillas seem happy and, in Koko’s case, willing to deal with media attention.”

Q1: Who are smarter, gorillas or humans? Koko Devil. Gorilla Koko love good.

Q2: What is the most fun to do?

Koko: Please eat. Please eat.

Q3: What makes you happy?

[*Slaps her chest*] Gorilla Koko love good. Koko love good fake tooth. [*Fake tooth is Koko’s sign for a gold dental cap or crown.*] Feel Devil know. Gorilla polite happy Koko.

Q4: Do you think Michael is cute?

Cute [*signed with two hands for emphasis equaling very cute*] sweet good.

Q5: What’s better than bananas?

Koko: Corn.

Q6: What’s the difference between boys and girls?

Corn there [*points toward floor*] good. [*Koko gets corn, because her floor is clean. Michael doesn’t, because his is dirty. The morning before the interview took place, Michael hadn’t received a corn treat, because he had urinated on the floor. The gorillas are toilet trained.*] Girl people. [*Koko thinks of herself as a person and of Michael as an animal.*]

Q7: Which sex smells better?

Koko: Girl girl.

Q8: What do you want to be when you grow up?

Polite want good. Gorilla good.

Q9: What don’t people understand?

Sorry good. [*When I say I’m sorry and I’ll be good*] Frown look lip [*her sign for female*] pimple [*people*] fake tooth. [*They frown when I want to look at women’s fake teeth.*] Gorilla don’t know Koko love good. [*Gorillas and people don’t know that Koko loves to be good.*]

Q10: What do you think of our language?

Fake lie good.

Q11: What’s your most troublesome thought?

That. [*Points toward gold-foil pattern on one of her scraps of fabric. Koko wants a gold tooth so badly that the night before, she had put a piece of gold braid into her mouth and swallowed it. Koko puts the gold foil against her first right upper molar, as if trying to make her tooth a gold one.*]

Q12: When is the kitten more trouble than it’s worth?

Cat bad good. Frown eat there. [*Points to her cereal—referring to the fact that her cat has, on occasion, eaten it*]

Q13: What’s it like having hands on your feet?

Good there [*floor*] there [*mesh fence*]. [*They’re good for use on the floor and on the fence.*]

Q14: What does it mean when you slap your chest?

Gorilla good. Drink hurry good drink me. [*Koko beats her chest to intimidate Penny, to get her to give her drinks, which have been restricted for a medical test.*]

Q15: What do you want for your birthday? Earrings. Cookie.

Q16: What do you say when you really want to insult people?

Dirty. Devil head.

Q17: How do you feel when you’ve eaten too much cake?

Sad bad stomach.

Q18: What would you eat for the sheer pleasure of it?

Champagne.

Q19: Is there anything else you want people to know about you?

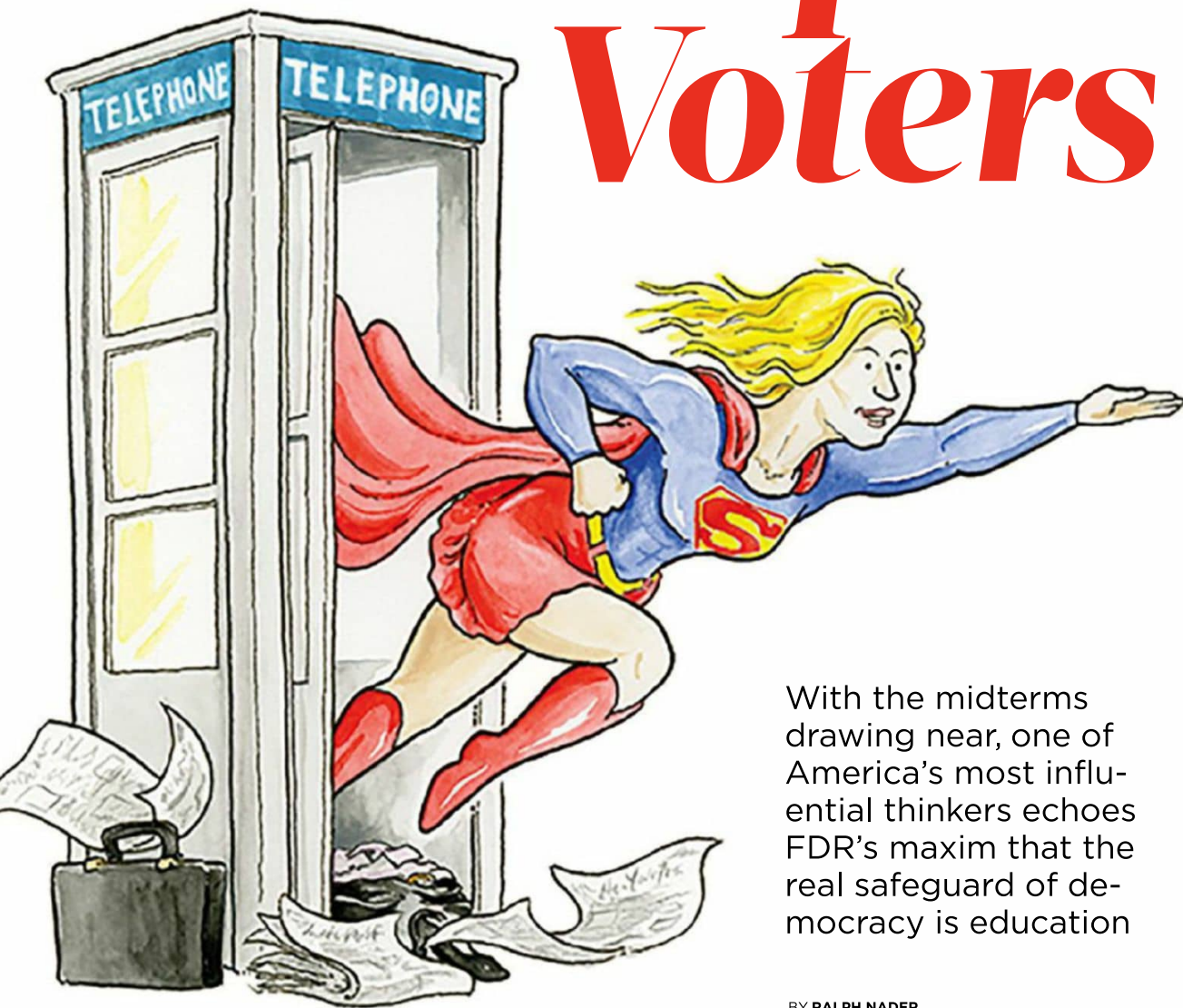
Me gorilla gorilla me Koko good ... finished.

Q20: What do you say when you’re tired of being asked questions?

Gorilla teeth. Finished.

Our favorite animal to go ape over sign language tells us what it’s like to have hands on her feet and why her friend Michael is the gorilla of her dreams

Calling *ALL* Super Voters



With the midterms drawing near, one of America's most influential thinkers echoes FDR's maxim that the real safeguard of democracy is education

BY RALPH NADER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM TORO

I'm writing these words almost exactly 50 years after I sat for my first Playboy Interview. It took place at the Washington Hilton hotel; below us, Connecticut Avenue was full with cars fleeing the fiery protests immediately following the slaying of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. The civil rights movement produced historic levels of activism and voter engagement, and many political observers believe the upcoming midterm elections will spark a new round of both. The obstacles to political action in the current political moment are significant but not insurmountable.

Over the past five decades we've seen ever-expanding control by global corporations over governments, technology, media, capital and labor. Changes have occurred in these areas that few would have anticipated, but the huge number of cynical nonvoters or poorly informed active ones has not significantly declined. The turnout of the voting-age population has been below 60 percent since 1968. And voters today, beset by even more issues, are relatively less informed than they were back then, despite the vast resources of the internet, live coverage of Congress by C-SPAN and instant free access to voting records.

Voter turnout in America is the lowest in the Western world. In some countries, such as Australia, voting is a duty. The United States is one of the few democracies in which voter registration is not automatic. To make matters worse, gerrymandering by both major parties is widespread, allowing politicians to pick their voters.

It's easy to demonstrate, starting with a weaker, corporatized Congress, that lawmakers are now more indentured to vested interests and less reflective of the people's necessities and need for justice than 50 years ago. The corporate state's attack on the poor, on labor, on consumer and environmental justice keeps expanding as companies export jobs, avoid taxes and profitably invade our privacy. Even state judicial elections are being corrupted with money: A report by the American Constitution Society titled "Justice at Risk" found a "significant relationship between business-group contributions to state supreme court justices and the voting of those justices in cases involving business matters. The more campaign contributions from business interests justices receive, the more likely they are to vote for business litigants appearing before them in court."

What about training yourself to become a super-voter—a voter who can't be outsmarted by the cleverest of smooth-talking politicians? You can start by recognizing a fundamental fact: The Constitution starts with "We the People," not "We the Congress" or "We the Corporations." As a republic, we delegate power to elected representatives to govern, but ultimately we are the sovereign power. We can take this power back fast. Start by showing up—which is half of democracy. Show up to vote, to run referenda, to attend town meetings,

rallies, marches and, sometimes, to present citizen petitions summoning your lawmakers to your own meetings to address your agenda. Organizers from Indivisible, a progressive nonprofit, have developed a variety of tools to help citizens hold members of Congress accountable. Its "Missing Members of Congress Action Plan" provides useful suggestions for motivating elected representatives to talk with the citizenry.

Avoid being a single-issue advocate, which politicians know how to handle. Instead present several popular redirections, from electoral reforms to improvements for workers, consumers and the environment, upgraded infrastructure and a smarter military and foreign policy. Politicians will realize you've done your homework. They'll sense that you aren't going away and that you're likely to have broad public support.

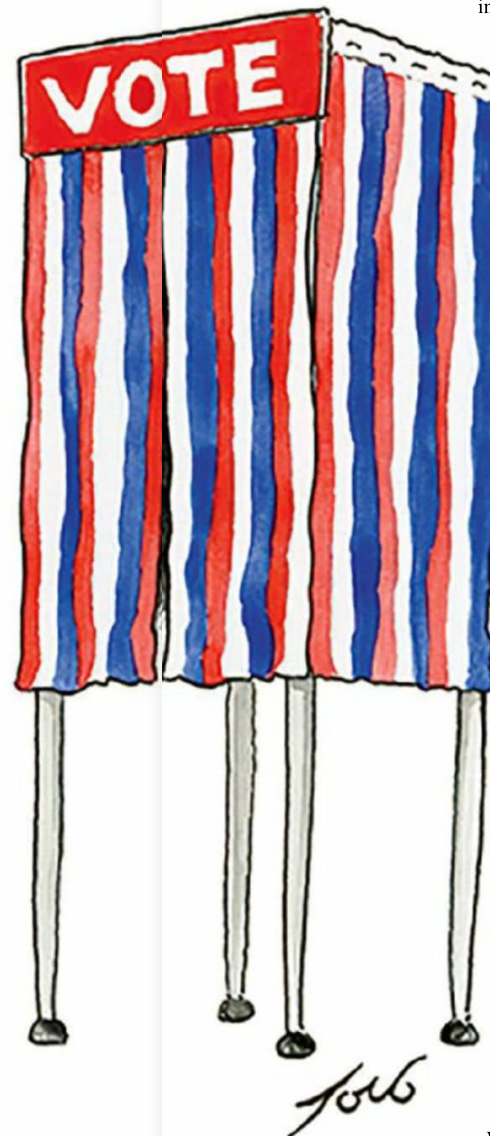
Hand your elected officials a voter self-help guide that lists where you stand in contrast to where the candidates stand or have avoided the issues. This juxtaposes your positions with theirs in a concise, personal manner. It will be difficult for them to sloganize their way out of addressing your concerns. They know that asking knowledgeable, tough questions is itself power, especially when you can publicize your positions on social media.

When they talk of starting wars, such as the undeclared criminal war of aggression against Iraq, you can ask, "What's your legal authority to do this under our Constitution and laws?" Many of these military actions are not legal—and both parties are guilty. As Yale law professor Bruce Ackerman wrote in *The New York Times*, "The legal machinations Mr. Obama has used to justify war without Congressional consent set a troubling precedent that could allow future administrations to wage war at their convenience—free of legislative checks and balances." Truth be known, politicians are most fearful of questions from 10-year-olds, such as "Why are you taking money from polluters?" or "Why do you have health insurance and we don't?" Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida have made politicians answer tough questions about gun control. Learn from them.

You have time to be a smart voter. You need only 10 to 20 hours of study between Labor Day and the midterms to absorb the necessary facts to choose candidates who will do right and not betray you—or you can write in your own candidate as a protest vote. And if you ever doubt your power, consider this: As I describe in my book *Breaking Through Power*, one percent or less of the voters in a congressional district can be the deciding factor in a serious push for changes backed by a majority opinion; that's true regardless of the corporate lobbies.

We live in a country that has far more problems than we deserve and far more solutions than we apply. It's time to hold up standards that will shift power back to "We the People."

One percent or less of the voters in a congressional district can be the deciding factor in a serious push for changes backed by a majority opinion.





Dope Tutor

Answers: Where Can I Buy Black-Owned Weed (and Why Is That Important)?

“It’s hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps when you’ve never had any boots, only knees on the neck,” says social-equity program manager Angela White

WRITTEN BY **ANDREW DEANGELO**

ILLUSTRATION BY **RICHARD A. CHANCE**

The very people who have borne the brunt of prohibition are now missing out on the massive cannabis boom.

Those of us who take pleasure in consuming cannabis owe a big debt to those in the Black community who kept the grass flowing so we could get stoned. Due to the criminalization of weed, Black people and other people of color have routinely paid a heavier price for their participation in cannabis culture and commerce. Cannabis laws were—and are—used to disproportionately arrest and imprison Black people. This has been going on for 100 years in America.

Former NBA star and current cannabis entrepreneur Al Harrington put it to me plainly.

“Cannabis prohibition was used to destroy the Black community,” he says, repeating the sentence to make sure I really heard. The word destroy resonates in my mind like a silent scream. Harrington is right. It’s a painful truth. One thing consumers can do to right that historical wrong is to give their cannabis dollars to Black-owned businesses.

Ten years ago Harrington co-founded cannabis brand Viola, a premium pre-roll and flower company named after his grandmother, who found that cannabis brought her relief from glaucoma. As CEO, Harrington is bringing more than pain relief and pleasure to the masses; Viola has committed to help minorities work toward ownership in cannabis, to assist license applicants as they navigate the complex process and to reinvest in community via projects such as food drives.

Steps like these are called social-equity measures, and they’re intended as a way to help correct systemic injustice: The very people who have borne the brunt of prohibition—people of color and low-income community members—are now missing out on the massive cannabis boom. The business world of legal

cannabis is currently overwhelmingly white; for entrepreneurs of color, barriers to entry can include lack of access to capital, existing cannabis convictions and predatory partners who seek to take advantage of social-equity licensees.

This imbalance of opportunity is one of the reasons it’s so important for individual consumers to support Black-owned weed companies. We

have a long way to go, but hope is building.

People of color have about 19 percent ownership in the weed industry as a whole, with Black ownership at approximately 4 percent. Black-owned cannabis is available across North America. There are Black-owned dispensaries from Boston to Palm Desert to Toronto, as well as Black-owned businesses all the way up the supply chain, be they THC cultivators, hemp growers, CBD brands or manufacturers.

You may be wondering where you can find these products. The good folks at Cannacclusive and ALMOSTCONSULTING make it easy with their InclusiveBase, which helps consumers locate

"When you buy cannabis from a Black-owned dispensary, you're helping to build generational wealth for people whose families have been destroyed by the war on drugs."

Black-, Latin- and woman-owned businesses. Another wonderful resource is Emerald’s “Conscious Consumption” list. (Over the past year, your Dope Tutor has sampled and enjoyed dozens of products thanks to these guides.) On your hunt for Black-owned cannabis, Google is your friend, and so is Instagram.

“When you buy cannabis from a Black-owned dispensary, you’re helping to build generational wealth for people whose families have been destroyed by the war on drugs,” says Angela White. White is the equity for industry program manager at San Francisco’s Success Centers, an organization that, among other things, helps people harmed by the war on drugs enter the legal cannabis industry. “It’s hard to pull yourself up by your bootstraps when you’ve never had any boots, only knees on the neck.”

Other outfits exist to nurture and educate aspiring entrepreneurs in the Black community and to help them enter the cannabis industry, including Hood Incubator in Oakland, California and Budding Solutions in Baltimore, Maryland.

Black ownership of cannabis businesses will grow as these programs bear fruit and investors, including athletes and celebrities, expand their reach into the industry. Jay-Z, for example, has a new flower brand called Monogram. He’s also giving back by launching a \$185.00 million venture fund that will contribute a portion of its net income “to invest in minority-owned and Black-owned cannabis businesses and contribute to the effort to rectify the wrongs of prohibition.” This is important because it addresses a massive hurdle to entry in the cannabis industry: access to capital.

More and more capital should soon be flowing into the hands of Black businesses. Activists have done an outstanding job ensuring social-equity licenses are available to people of color in many legal states, and that effort must continue. If so, investors will have little choice but to invest in the Black community if they want to be in this business. This will allow Black entrepreneurs to open their doors to you, the customer; it’s at that moment that you can activate your moral compass and be part of the solution.

Buy Black-owned weed for your next purchase and you’ll be part of starting to right the wrongs of the past, while getting some very fine ganja at the same time. That seems like a wonderful way to celebrate Black History Month to me. Just make sure to carry your celebration—and your support of Black-owned businesses—throughout the rest of the year too.



Journalists **Are Not Expendable**

WRITTEN BY **BRIAN KAREM**

PHOTO BY **LEFTERIS PITRAKIS/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK**

Donald Trump is the disaster that keeps on giving.

If Shel Silverstein were still alive he'd have great fun with the grotesquely fetid nature of Trump's unnatural "gifts" to the American people. Trump is a perverse Giving Tree. His minions are like spoiled children incapable of setting aside their own interests

to help the public they are supposed to serve. Republican Senator Ted Cruz, who abandoned his constituents for Cancún during Texas's deadly weather crisis, is a prime example.

Public service means putting the interests of the people ahead of your own. It's a test that too many of our public servants (like Cruz) routinely fail.

The greatest immediate test facing the United States remains battling the coronavirus pandemic, thanks in no small part to the Trump administration having ignored the health crisis and the public's needs and then lying about it. Trump routinely lied, creating cancerous fictions to justify his own selfish needs; his lies brought about a national existential crisis that led directly to the January 6 insurrection (and two separate impeachments).

Trump constructed his fictional world by destroying faith in the Fourth Estate. He infamously confessed to Lesley Stahl of 60 Minutes that he attacked the press so people wouldn't believe us. The simple fact is we cannot make the land safe for democracy until we make the land safe for facts, and safe for those of us presenting facts—whether we find those facts (or those who present them) pleasant or unpleasant.

President Joe Biden recognized this in the first policy speech of his administration, saying, "A free press is essential to the health of a democracy." Two legislative proposals have been introduced on Capitol Hill: the Global Press Freedom Act and the Jamal Khashoggi Press Freedom Accountability Act. The latter bill, introduced earlier this month in the House by Representative Adam Schiff and in the Senate late last year by Senators Amy Klobuchar and Patrick Leahy, aims to strengthen U.S. resolve to protect journalists and hold accountable countries and foreign individuals found responsible for killing or harming them.

"The United States' commitment to the protection of journalists and the promotion of press freedom

internationally is critical given its prominent role on the world stage," said Anna K. Nelson, executive director of Reporters Without Borders USA. "Not only does this bill seek justice for the senseless murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it also increases protection for reporters who risk torture, imprisonment and even death as they report critical information."

The Global Press Freedom Act would institutionalize the U.S. commitment to advancing press freedom abroad by creating the role of an "ambassador at large" who would engage with governments and organizations to draw attention to violations of press freedom and reporter safety.

Both acts are needed. But we are still waiting for Biden to take a critical first step toward protecting freedom of the press.

The January 6 Capitol insurrection exposed some reporters, for the first time, to the kinds of physical dangers that journalists around the world routinely face, though the press at the White House now works safely from behind miles of menacing fencing. Still, we have been slow to insist that Biden clean up one of Trump's most grievous offenses—the threat against the truth.

True, in his first five weeks in the White House, Biden has done much to turn down the volume of Trump's war on truth and to foster a return to pre-Trumpian norms. This is necessary so that the shared concerns of the majority of citizens can be addressed without the fictional rhetoric that dominated the

In his first five weeks in the White House, Biden has done much to turn down the volume of Trump's war on truth.

Trump era. But I do not believe Biden has yet clearly addressed the real damage caused by Trump's attacks on truth, nor taken the essential steps needed to support a free press.

If President Biden is serious about returning the United States to constitutional norms, he must find a way to stop threats against reporters. There is no better way to do this than decisively addressing the assassination of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. Thanks to Biden's restrictive Covid-19 policies for White House reporters, I have been unable to question him or anyone in his administration publicly and directly about this.

In early February I asked my respected colleague, pool reporter Rob Crilly of the Washington Examiner, to ask Press Secretary Jen Psaki a question for me, since I couldn't get into the briefing under the new protocols. He obliged. "We saw a break with Saudi policy yesterday in the Middle East," Crilly asked. "So will the Biden administration openly condemn or implement sanctions against the Saudi government for the death of Washington Post writer Jamal Khashoggi?"

There is little doubt the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman (or MBS) is behind the death of Khashoggi, who was murdered and dismembered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, by agents of the Saudi government.

Trump said little about it and did even less. He defended MBS and continued to do business with the Saudis, issuing a statement in November 2018 saying the United States was "standing with Saudi Arabia" for strategic reasons. "It could very well be that the Crown Prince had knowledge of this tragic event—maybe he did and maybe he didn't!" After information tying MBS to Khashoggi's assassination became public, Trump went so far as to cast doubt on the evidence. "I've seen so many different reports," he said in June 2019 on Meet the Press, then telling host Chuck Todd about the Saudis, "Take their money. Take their money, Chuck."

The lack of U.S. response to Khashoggi's murder increases the risk to every reporter on the planet. If those known to be responsible go unpunished, it puts a bull's-eye squarely on our backs. Further, if D.C. continues to do business as usual with Saudi Arabia, it tells the world we have no moral standing. We care only about the money. It's a brutal world, folks. So much for empathy.

Back at the early February briefing, Psaki recognized there was a problem as she answered my question posed by Crilly. "First, let me say and reiterate: The murder of Jamal Khashoggi was a horrific crime. We are prepared to release an unclassified report with

Journalists don't generally have cheerleaders.

full transparency for Congress," she said. "This is the law, and we'll follow the law. Of course, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence would have further details, and I would refer you to them for additional specifics." She said a little bit more about expecting Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights record and ended by saying, "I don't have any policy decisions to read out for you or predict for you at this point in time."

This is not enough. Psaki simply failed to say what needed to be said.

Last Tuesday she inched closer to addressing the issue. When asked if Biden sees Saudi Arabia as an ally, Psaki said, "We've made clear from the beginning that we're going to recalibrate our relationship with Saudi Arabia, and part of that is going back to engagement, counterpart to counterpart. The president's counterpart is King Salman"—not MBS.

This Monday Psaki reacted to another question about accountability for Khashoggi's murder, saying that unlike the last administration, Biden "is not going to hold back in speaking out when he has objections, concerns about issues related to human rights, freedom of speech, any other concerns he may have about the way things are being run."

That's fine as far as it goes, but it isn't enough to just say the state-sponsored murder of a Washington Post columnist is wrong—not that she said even that much. We all know it is wrong. What needs to be said by the president of the United States is that there will be serious repercussions for it and that it will never be tolerated by this country. It must be denounced in the strongest terms, and no quarter given to those who would sponsor or otherwise support this behavior. Tinhoorn dictators must be put on notice: You cannot kill reporters with impunity.

Khashoggi's death, unanswered by the U.S., increased the risk for all members of the press who simply do their jobs—even those privileged reporters who rarely make it beyond the White House and into



the real world. As Christophe Deloire, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, put it: “When the press is silenced, corruption, violence, inequalities and abuses of power can escape unnoticed.”

Journalists don’t generally have cheerleaders. Readers who cheer us on Monday for reporting information with which they agree will angrily dismiss us on Tuesday for reporting information with which they strongly disagree. That’s part of the job.

Renowned reporter Helen Thomas once told me that if I were looking for friends, I should try a different profession. She was right. But allowing people to disagree with or denounce reporters is a far cry from sanctioning the murder of a columnist who criticizes you.

No one was surprised by Donald Trump’s lack of action on the matter as president. What’s fairly surprising is Biden’s lack of action. On Wednesday, when asked twice about Saudi Arabia and once about Khashoggi, Psaki again refused to decisively address the issue. If the United States does not now hold accountable those who killed Jamal Khashoggi, then we are accomplices after the fact.

President Biden must take decisive and definitive action to make sure despots around the world will take notice: You cannot kill reporters without facing consequences.

If he doesn’t squarely address this issue, then Biden is no better than Trump, who failed to do so; no better than Cruz, fleeing the country while his constituents suffer.

Please, President Biden. Remember Jamal Khashoggi.



Claudia FIJAL

Instagram @claudiafijal

Photography by **Nico Muñoz** | @nicoricooo
MUA **Veronica Muñoz** | @vthemakeupartist
Creative Director **Daniel Stevens** | @dmoneystevens
PR **LA Media Group** | @la.mediagroup







Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! What are the plans this year for you? The pleasure is truly all mine! This year my goals are to plan for my long-term future. I've very heavily invested right now into purchasing real estate for short- and long-term rentals. Short term, my social media presence is still a priority with engaging as much as I can with my incredible fans on my OnlyFans!

What is at the top of your list to achieve the most in the year 2022? A few investment properties that are bringing in consistent passive income.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? To me, a strong woman is one that is not afraid to stand for her beliefs, no matter what the trends may be. Women are so often underestimated, even still in this day and age. I've been told by several people my drive and focus are intimidating, but it's the only way I know how to operate!

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? I've been a professional model since the age of 12! I had major international contracts around the world before Instagram was around! Photographers are always thankful I understand a lot of the fundamentals of modeling, on top, of course, showing up and looking great!

Where are we most likely to find you if not in front of the camera being glamorous? I am a workaholic. My days consist of sitting in front of my computer 12-14 hours a day and creating content, editing, engaging with fans, and growing my online presence. In the rare times, I'm off, you'll likely find me on a flight to a new destination or trying new food at an upbeat restaurant. Food and travel are my favorite hobbies.

What are some of your biggest passions? Giving back. My father is a

well-known activist in Poland and he's inspired me so much in life. The more you give, the more the universe returns to you.

3 ultimate deal-breakers when it comes to men? Lack of ambition, not worldly and well versed in important topics, someone who likes to gossip.

What are some of the things that attract you to a man? Someone who matches my work drive, someone who loves to explore and travel, a gentleman with not so gentleman-like bedroom behavior.

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? I want multiple real estate properties, one or two more dogs, have seen more of the world, and genuinely knowing my presence on this planet has influenced more people in positive ways.

What is the wrong way to approach you as an admirer? I'm always down for a conversation, but please respect my personal space and time. I think social media has made it seem like everyone is available immediately because we put so much out there. But believe it or not, as public as my persona is, I'm a very private person.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? ClaudiaFijalOfficial.com - you can also subscribe to my YouTube channel where I release two new episodes a week! Claudiafijal.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? I genuinely love my connection with my fans. Talking and getting to know you guys is so important to me, so please feel free to join my private sites, and let's chat! Thank you for this incredible opportunity, Playboy!





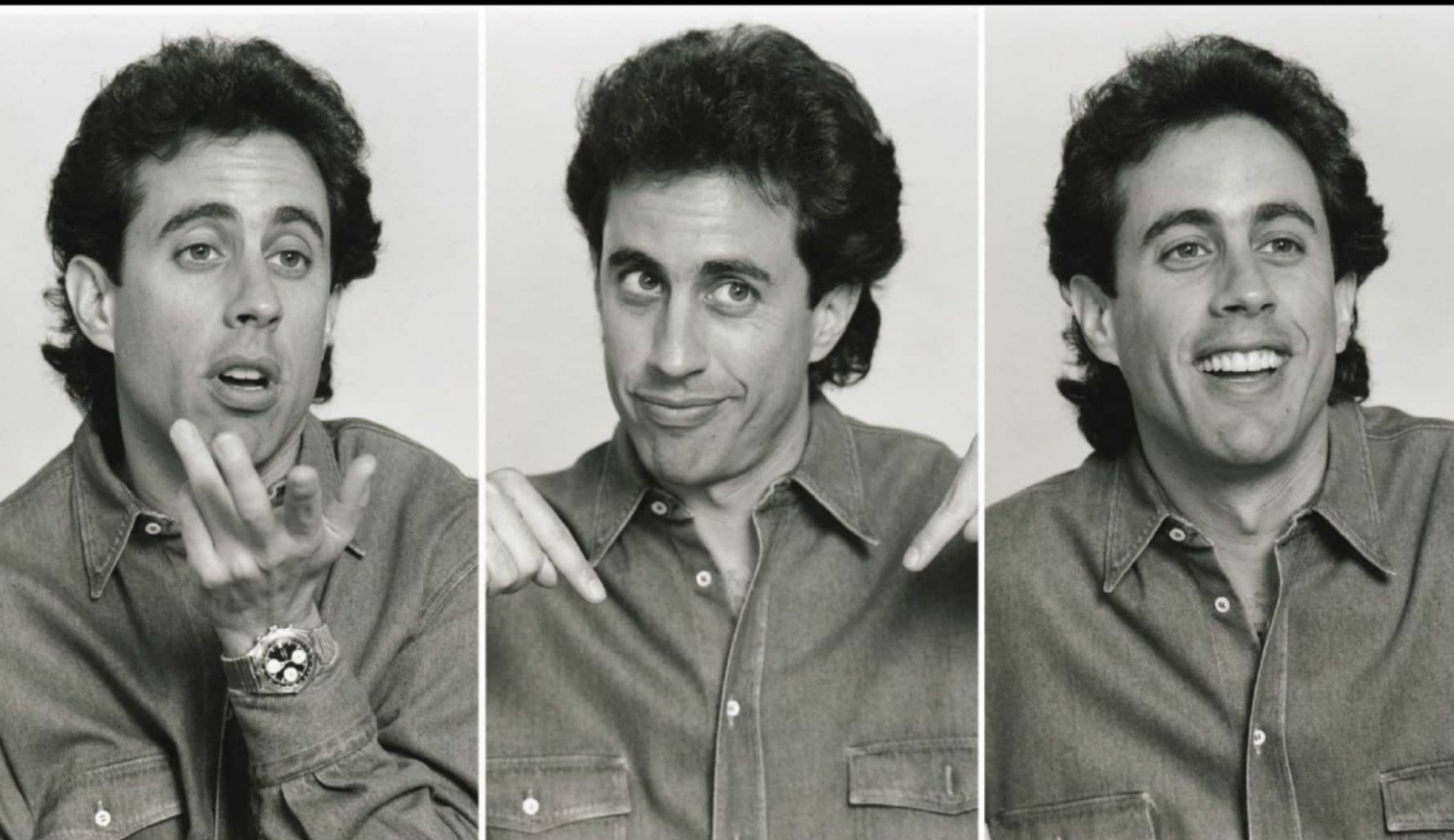
Playboy Interview

Jerry Seinfeld

A candid conversation with TV's top-rated comic about the important things: sneakers, masturbation, dating teenagers and making a hit show about nothing

INTERVIEW BY DAVID RENSIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIZUNO



This is the introduction to the Playboy Interview, the part you read before you get to the questions and answers. It's an important part. Just read what this month's subject, comedian Jerry Seinfeld, says about it.

"I think the introduction is one of the best parts of the interview. I also like where they go '[laughs]' and '[smiles].' But to tell you the truth, in the introduction you always pick up some juicy little personal tidbit, like the subject just came back from t'ai chi. You also get the thing about when the interviewer drove up to the house and what the guy was wearing, what he drank. You find he does some little thing you didn't know about, like eating potato chips through the whole interview. I remember someone once ate french fries. I thought, Whoa. He eats french fries. That's what I'm interested in.

"Plus, when something is in italics it calls a great deal of attention to itself. A word in italics almost seems to vibrate on the page. And this is a whole page of italics."

Five years ago, Jerry Seinfeld was a thin, single, mild-mannered, obsessively neat comedian working the stand-up circuit, making a name for himself as a bright and funny guy. Today, he's a thin, single, mild-mannered, obsessively neat comedian and TV star whose hit sitcom, *Seinfeld*, has garnered amazing media coverage and critical acclaim—especially for a show that is admittedly about nothing.

"Nothing" fits Seinfeld's particular brand of comedy—some call it observational or deconstructionist—like a glove. Seinfeld plays Jerry Seinfeld, who, of course, is a 39-year-old, thin, single and obsessively neat comedian living in an Upper West Side New York apartment. He has three friends: Elaine (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), the ex-girlfriend, now platonic gal pal; George (Jason Alexander), the balding and unemployed paragon of low self-esteem; and Kramer (Michael Richards), the eccentric neighbor who proves you can get by in life no matter how unusual your hairstyle. When they're not gathered in Seinfeld's apartment or sharing a booth at a local coffee shop, they're living life at its most mundane and uneventful, asking questions such as "Why do I get bananas? They're good for one day," confronting what *Entertainment Weekly* called "the little adjustments of daily urban life that no network in its right mind would turn into a sitcom."

In the wrong hands this would not be particularly funny. It would possibly even be boring. After all, how funny can an entire show about waiting for a table in a Chinese restaurant be?

Pretty funny, according to Washington Post TV critic Tom Shales, who wrote that Seinfeld can be "painfully amusing and amusingly painful." In one show, the four characters lose their car in a mall parking garage. In another they ride the subway. Recently, Jerry's car had a horrible odor he couldn't get rid of.

Seinfeld specializes in unusual topics: masturbation and who can go the longest without it, breast implants, pooper scoopers and the perils of trying to make friends as an adult. Other shows wouldn't touch these subjects with a 13-episode commitment, unless there were a few hugs and a life-affirming moral attached. Seinfeld eschews hugs. And morals. And anything that smacks of neatly summing up life in 22 minutes.

When it debuted, Seinfeld was a critical hit and a cult favorite. Cult favorites, of course, don't impress network executives unless the cult starts to grow—and the Seinfeld cult did. *TV Guide* said: "The yen for Seinfeld's idiosyncratic hipness is on the upswing," and went on to describe the sitcom as "resolutely minor crises played out with excruciatingly wry precision that has distinguished the show as thirtysomething," comic style." Eventually, Seinfeld was holding its own on Wednesday nights on NBC—until ABC's *Home Improvement* moved in next door. The more mainstream *Home Improvement* clobbered Seinfeld in the ratings, so NBC moved Seinfeld to Thursday, following *Cheers*. The viewership expanded instantly, and NBC turned to Jerry in much the same way it turned to Bill Cosby 10 years ago—to anchor its all-important Thursday-night lineup.

Despite his youthful appearance, Seinfeld is no overnight sensation. The middle-class kid from Massapequa, Long Island had an uneventful childhood. He wasn't popular, he wasn't unpopular. He wasn't part of the in crowd, he wasn't a ladies' man. He had ambition, but it was largely

unattainable: to be Superman. Instead, he decided to become a comedian. His first funny venture was taping interviews with his parakeet.

Seinfeld's late father, Kalman, was a salesman and a funny guy, but the son never considered trying to out-funny his father. And when Seinfeld graduated from Queens College, started doing stand-up and then decided on a career making people pay to laugh, his folks supported his decision.

There were a few odd jobs along the way: selling light bulbs over the phone, peddling jewelry on the sidewalks of Manhattan. Seinfeld got two nights and 70 bucks a week emceeing at the Comic Strip, and he knew he was on his way. He simply didn't realize what a slow trip it would be.

Other comics seemed to make it overnight. Garry Shandling, who first appeared on *The Tonight Show* about the same time as Seinfeld, became a big name, a Carson substitute and the star of a cable series, while Seinfeld continued playing small clubs and flying in coach. Shortly after being cast as the governor's joke writer on *Benson* for a few episodes, he showed up for work to discover he'd lost his job. No one had bothered to tell him. So Seinfeld went back to the comedy circuit, traveling 300 days a year, hitting the talk shows and doing a fairly lackluster cable special.

Slowly but steadily his success grew. Clubs turned into arenas, sold-out signs began appearing on box offices and TV producers saw him as the next Bob Newhart.

And then one day, after he and comedian pal Larry David finished performing at *Catch a Rising Star*, they came up with the idea for Seinfeld. Originally, it was just about two guys talking, dissecting the world—something comedians tend to do offstage with other comedians. NBC ordered a pilot.

Working on Seinfeld, says Seinfeld, is like being in a submarine. The hours are long and constant, and the responsibilities are shared among a small group, with little network interference. Seinfeld, Larry David and a tight inner circle come up with the ideas and write the scripts. Seinfeld also has to come up with a couple of minutes of material every week for the onstage monologue that winds through the show.

Although there's time for little else but work during the TV season, all the work has paid off. Seinfeld is solidly in the Nielsen top 10 and was nominated for 11 Emmys. Seinfeld himself is a media rage. There's a line of greeting cards, and the cast can be seen on boxes of Kellogg's low-fat granola. He even has a book out of observations on life called *Sein Language*. This is what he told the press at a New York comedy club when he announced the publishing deal: "I'm not really an author. I've been writing for 17 years. I'm just presenting it differently. I'm numbering the pages."

Here's the point in the introduction that Seinfeld likes so much—where we tell you that we asked Contributing Editor David Rensin to meet with Seinfeld and have him expand on all the stuff we just told you. Rensin had this to say about his experience:

"I met Jerry on the set. He looked just like he does on TV. Who says the camera adds 15 pounds? He gave me a Polaroid camera and asked if I would take a picture of him and his baby to put on the makeup-trailer wall next to everyone else's 'with baby' pictures. Seinfeld's baby turned out to be a 1958 baby-blue Porsche Speedster.

"During our first session, at Jerry's newly remodeled, largely unfurnished, 6,500-square-foot Hollywood Hills home, he offered me a glass of water. There were no tables so I set it on the carpet next to the couch. I had my legs up, trying to keep my shoes off the couch (with middling success). When we were done, Jerry hopped up and snatched my glass off the carpet before I could bus it myself. He wasn't taking any chances of a spill.

"Frankly, interviewing a guy who is supposed to be just like his TV character makes one wonder what to talk about. What was I going to ask him? Why do you like cereal so much? Does the TV Jerry own as many pairs of sneakers as you do? Why are you so neat? Actually, I did have a few questions designed to get at the man behind the man whom everyone thinks they know so well. But before I could ask even one, Jerry posed a question of his own."

SEINFELD: When are we going to get to the sex part?

PLAYBOY: The sex part?

SEINFELD: Yeah. I think people want to know what I'm doing sexually and what my experiences have been, what kind of sexual prowess or power I may have because of my position. What instructions were you given as far as, "Find out about his sex life"?

PLAYBOY: Okay. Do you have sex?

SEINFELD: Yes, I do.

PLAYBOY: Good. And now—

SEINFELD: Is that it? Is it over?

PLAYBOY: What's your hurry?

SEINFELD: You're such a tease.

PLAYBOY: Stick around.

SEINFELD: There's something else besides sex I want to talk about. I would like to blow the lid off the three quotes under the three pictures. I wasn't saying any of these things when the three pictures were taken. They are the three best pictures and the three best quotes, but they're completely unrelated to one another. In fact, if any of this is under the pictures, I'm telling you right now that there's no camera here.

PLAYBOY: What if we let you choose the quotes?

SEINFELD: Great. So put "This is not what I was saying when these pictures were taken. In fact, if any of this is under the pictures, I'm telling you right now that there's no camera here" under the first. And "When are we going to get to the sex part?" under the second. I'll think of a third as we go along.

PLAYBOY: Fine. There's one last thing to clear up. Are we talking to the real Jerry or the TV Jerry?

SEINFELD: What do you mean?

PLAYBOY: One of your TV show's conceits is that the real Jerry and the TV Jerry are supposed to be the same guy.

SEINFELD: They're not that different.

But I'm the real Jerry.

PLAYBOY: Can you prove it?

SEINFELD: I have no script [*holds up his hands*].

PLAYBOY: That must take away all your image worries.

SEINFELD: I found an acceptable image that was really pretty much me, and that's how I've done everything. That's why I was able to do the show and why I've succeeded as a comedian. I don't have the energy to maintain an image.

PLAYBOY: So, people who stop you on the street must really think they know you.

SEINFELD: They know me better than they know Dan Rather. You couldn't predict what Dan Rather would do in most situations, but I think you could with me. I wouldn't mind an "Excuse me" before a total stranger starts talking to me. That's the most amusing and most bizarre thing about celebrity. I'm walking down the street, someone walks up alongside of me and says, "So, how come Elaine and you got together only that one time?" They don't say, "Excuse me, could I talk to you for one second?" Nothing. We're just talking as if we've been talking for blocks. This happens all the time.

PLAYBOY: By the way, how was sex with Elaine?

SEINFELD: Well, you can see that she's very expressive. The way she moves, she has a physical fluidity. You can see that just by watching her talk. It's not a big leap for someone with imagination.

PLAYBOY: Which our readers—

SEINFELD: Probably don't have.

PLAYBOY: Why do you say that?

SEINFELD: If you have a good imagination, you usually don't need visual aids. I don't mean to offend, but who's going to get this deep into the interview anyway? They're probably at the centerfold by now

PLAYBOY: They might have turned to it first.

SEINFELD: That's right. [*Laughs*] And now they're falling asleep.

PLAYBOY: Whom would you stop on the street just to meet?

SEINFELD: Abraham Lincoln. I'd say, "I'm sorry, I'm sure you get this all the time, but I just think you're fantastic."

PLAYBOY: Seriously, are strangers so taken with Seinfeld that they insist their lives are perfect material for the show?

SEINFELD: That's a compliment. I'm doing something that seems so taken from their own lives they can't help but assume that everything in their lives must be funny.

PLAYBOY: Are they right or wrong?

SEINFELD: They're wrong. They may be funny enough to get them through that moment at the water cooler, but they're not funny enough to be on television in front of millions of people and have them buy a Geo Prizm as a result. I take it as a comment on my skill as a comedian. It seems like nothing. It should seem like something anyone could do.

PLAYBOY: What are the levels of comedy?

SEINFELD: Making your friends laugh, making strangers laugh, making strangers laugh for money and making people act like you.

PLAYBOY: Do civilians always try to make you laugh?

SEINFELD: Could you explain that to me, please? What the hell is that phenomenon? If I meet singers, I don't go, "Hey, what do you think of this?" and sing. Why would you invite that humiliation by trying to be funny around a comedian? To make a comedian laugh, you have to be funnier than you are when you make your friends laugh. Funnier than you've ever been in your life. What are the odds that you're going to succeed? Why do you try?

PLAYBOY: Are you kind to amateurs?

SEINFELD: I'm very kind. Everyone has a few fake laughs they use to get through life. The snort, the snort-chuckle, the nod-smile, the "That's good!" But they're all just nice ways of saying "Stop. Please stop."

PLAYBOY: So the constant attention of strangers—

SEINFELD: I'm annoyed. But if you're not cranky and annoyed, you can't be a comedian. Any good comedian is, by definition, highly irritable. Even I, though I may not seem to be, am constantly irritated.

PLAYBOY: What irritates you?

SEINFELD: Everything. I just hate everything and everybody. And that's why I'm so funny. If I didn't have all these sensitivities, I'd have nothing to talk about.

PLAYBOY: Do you owe your public?

SEINFELD: That's where the money's coming from, isn't it?

PLAYBOY: That's an elegant way of looking at it.

SEINFELD: That's my job: to understand what's going on in life, to figure it out. The news, books, magazines and films cover a certain portion of what's going on. But there's a lot of stuff that's not touched on, and that's my job. To tell you the truth, 75 percent of the world is not touched on except by comedians.

PLAYBOY: Which you do in your TV show—

SEINFELD: Wait. What about the sex part?

PLAYBOY: First the TV show.

SEINFELD: Oh, Seinfeld. Yes, I've seen it. It's quite a charming little piece of work, isn't it?

PLAYBOY: Especially for a show that's supposed to be about nothing. What exactly does that mean?

SEINFELD: It's actually about details. We joke that it's about nothing because there's no concept behind the show, there's nothing intrinsically funny in the situation. It's just about four people. There's no thread. No high concept.

PLAYBOY: But isn't Hollywood built on concept?

SEINFELD: That is the concept: no concept.

PLAYBOY: Which, as we've already mentioned, fuels the perception

that your real life is just as it's portrayed on the show.

SEINFELD: I play myself as I was before I got the show. I understand that people would like to think that they're looking into my actual life. It would be fun if that were true. People want to get to know people they see on TV. That's why they read interviews. That's why they watch talk shows. Other cultures accept performers as they view them. Americans see performers whom they like and they want to know, "Hey, what's behind that? How did they get to be that way? How do they come up with their ideas?"

PLAYBOY: What do you think is behind this obsession?

SEINFELD: I guess Americans are just nosy. They want a little bit more. It's the same concept behind extra-strength pain relievers. What the hell is extra strength? We don't know how much strength they were giving us, and we don't know how much more "extra" is. But we're giving you extra, and Americans like that idea. We'll throw in the floor mats when you buy a new car. It's that little something. Then, when they've found out enough about a person, they start to hate him. Then they move on to the next person.

PLAYBOY: Thanks. You've just explained the entire—

SEINFELD: Cycle of celebrity.

PLAYBOY: Can you deconstruct anything?

SEINFELD: Deconstruction. That's a very good word for what I do. I have a friend who's not a comedian, he's a computer analyst. He's always going, "See, there's something funny about this saltshaker, but I can't see it. You could see it." And it frustrates him. He's looking at the saltshaker and I'm looking at the saltshaker, and he knows there's a joke there. He can't find it.

PLAYBOY: Have you found anything you can't deconstruct?

SEINFELD: Yeah, sure. I can't crack most things. You don't realize that the joke is the diamond. The joke is the fleck of gold after going through a ton of rock. And you're saying to me, "What's rock?" The whole world is rock. I've found this little lump of gold—my comedy material—and I've made it into an act.

PLAYBOY: Do you enjoy your job?

SEINFELD: I am my job. Everything else in life pales by comparison to the interpretive experience: seeing something, interpreting it, shaping it, communicating it and being affirmed for it. Every time something funny is discovered, it's an absolute miracle. And the most amazing thing is when I have only three minutes to think of something funny. We shot a show recently where George borrows his father's car and it gets destroyed by a gang—it's actually more complicated than that. We're in this scene where I'm standing next to George and his father's car. The door is ripped off, the engine's destroyed, the windows are all smashed. We're shooting, it's late, it's cold, we need a line. What can I say? I love that.

PLAYBOY: What did you come up with?

SEINFELD: I said to him: "You know, a lot of these scratches will buff right out."

PLAYBOY: Why do you come to a scene like that without a line?

SEINFELD: Because—I knew you were going to ask that, by the way—we were going to try to make the joke with a camera shot. But once we were all standing by the car, it needed what they call a button.

PLAYBOY: So this is the thrill of comedy.

SEINFELD: I've learned that when I really need to think of something funny, I'm often able to do it. I never knew I could do that. I always thought it took hours. But I found out that sometimes the mind can work faster when it's under pressure, even comically.

PLAYBOY: Were you this quick when you were younger? Or were you

quick but not funny?

SEINFELD: We have ourselves a nice little setup here, haven't we? It's worked very well. I probably was quick when I was younger, but I didn't know it, so it's the same as not being quick. Here's what it comes down to: You need talent, you need brains and you need confidence. Those are the three things you need to do virtually anything. Confidence is a fascinating commodity. There's no upper limit on the usefulness of it, as long as it doesn't bleed into arrogance. You need as much of it as you can get.

PLAYBOY: Considering your current popularity, you must be overflowing with the stuff.

SEINFELD: That's what I've gained from this show. And that's what I wanted from day one. I didn't want a successful TV series, I didn't want money, fame—any of the things any normal person would want. I wanted the confidence I would have if I could do it.

PLAYBOY: How do you know when it becomes arrogance?

SEINFELD: When you're losing. When you start making bets that you're not winning. I've always had a lot of confidence. But I wanted more. As a comedian you're never as good as you want to be. To me that means being strong enough to take your time with an audience. Young comedians—most comedians—work onstage at a breathless pace, and that's out of fear. I do it, too. It keeps it going. But when you can slow down and hold people, that's being good enough. I love seeing Bill Cosby tell a story slowly. Comedy strength is slowness. Jack Benny is a per-

fect example. He would come out onstage, wouldn't say anything. He would just stand there and the people would start to laugh. I mean, that is comic strength. But to wait for the laugh, that's balls. And I say balls only because it's Playboy.

PLAYBOY: Can you apply this to other things?

SEINFELD: It applies to everything. Of course it applies to life. The good things in life, the most interesting things in life, are the things that distill life—like comedy, like baseball and art. Whatever takes the experience and kind of crushes it down into something you can grab. That's why you go to a movie. That's why you read a book. That's why everybody likes epigrams and aphorisms. You feel, like, if you go to a movie, maybe you'll experience more of life in that two hours than you would in just your own life.

That's what a lot of entertainment is: a condensed life experience.

PLAYBOY: Let's get back to Seinfeld. Is it true that all the cast members hate one another?

SEINFELD: Yes. We're at one another's throats constantly. [*Laughs*]

PLAYBOY: How are you dealing with Kramer's transformation into a pop-culture superstar?

SEINFELD: I think he's bigger than I am. Michael Richards has a unique talent, which needed to find a place. Before this show, nobody was using him properly. He's like this engine, just running and running. It's not in gear, it's not driving anything. And if you don't hook it up with something, it's going to turn on you. Having a talent is a kill-or-be-killed thing. Especially comedic talent. It has to be focused on other people, or it turns on you in the most vicious way.

PLAYBOY: And then what happens?

SEINFELD: You become self-destructive. Or you have to leave the country. I know a guy who had to leave the country.

PLAYBOY: Isn't he just killing himself in some other country?

SEINFELD: No, he's forgotten about it. He's away from it. He doesn't have to see all his friends on TV and know that he's funnier than they are but he's not doing anything.

PLAYBOY: How are you taking your own transformation into an icon?

SEINFELD: Great. Unfortunately, right now I’m out of control.

PLAYBOY: If you’re talking about the line of Seinfeld greeting cards, that does seem over the top.

SEINFELD: Yeah, I wasn’t too happy with the greeting cards. It seemed like a good idea then. We were approached by a reputable merchandiser, and at the time we weren’t doing well against Home Improvement. We needed every bit of promo we could get. By the time the stuff came out, the landscape had changed. It’s not really right for us anymore.

PLAYBOY: Is that what you mean by being out of control?

SEINFELD: No. For 98 percent of my career I was completely at the wheel. All my performances, my level, my workload—it was all under control. Now I’m just hanging on to this thing. My career has now developed a life and a power of its own, and I am just a passenger. I don’t like peaks. I always wanted to have a plateau kind of career. I shudder when I see these people skyrocket and then flame out in a second. I wouldn’t want Madonna’s kind of career, where you constantly have to make battleships disappear. I’m more into watchmaking. I’m most interested in having a body of work, to say that I created all this material and I did these shows.

PLAYBOY: So you’re in this for the long haul?

SEINFELD: I will have longevity. I’d like to play the London Palladium when I’m 100, just like George Burns. No, make that 110. But I still can’t believe it can go on the way it has for much longer. I mean, I’m almost out of things to say. No, I’m just kidding.

PLAYBOY: Enough about you. Why is Seinfeld a hit?

SEINFELD: It has an urban flavor. It’s about single life. Everyone is single at some point. But mostly it’s about being offbeat. Almost everything we do is offbeat. Even ordinary things somehow come out offbeat. We don’t want to do stuff we’ve seen. We try to step into real life. When Roseanne does a show about teenage abortion, that’s real too. But our field of expertise seems to be more minute.

PLAYBOY: Who’s the audience?

SEINFELD: The bored, the disaffected, the disenfranchised. The tired, the huddled masses. I did a bit about that on the show.

“Must we specifically request the worst people in the world? Why don’t we just say our doors are open and we’ll take whatever you’ve got? Do we have to say, ‘Give us your tired, your poor’? Do they have to be tired? People who don’t return calls—anybody who can’t do something—send them over.” You have to expose yourself to the show for a while, develop a taste for the characters, the situations, the jokes, the stories. It’s not everyone’s cup of tea.

PLAYBOY: It wasn’t when it was on Wednesday nights.

SEINFELD: Home Improvement was killing us. It has a broader appeal.

PLAYBOY: Why are you doing better on Thursdays?

SEINFELD: I don’t know.

PLAYBOY: Your co-creator, Larry David, said that if people didn’t watch on Wednesdays he didn’t want them to watch on Thursdays.

SEINFELD: I never agreed with that. I wanted people to watch it. The show is funny. There’s not much good comedy on TV, period. Funny is hard. It’s like Michelangelo’s David. I was just in Florence. I saw the David. I also saw some of the other statues littered around the city—the legs were too thick, the proportions off—and it was clear Mike knew what he was doing. Sitcoms are hard because there are so many people involved,

"I'm annoyed. But if you're not cranky and annoyed, you can't be a comedian. Even I, though I might not seem to be, am constantly irritated. If I didn't have all these sensitivities, I'd have nothing to talk about."

and good comedy is always specific. Our show is basically run by Larry David and me without any interference. That’s one reason the material is good. We’re not trying to please anybody but ourselves. It’s not homogenized, it’s not run through the system.

PLAYBOY: And how would that change things?

SEINFELD: We did this line in the show a couple weeks ago where an ex-boyfriend of Elaine’s was being operated on. Kramer wanted to watch and wanted somebody to go with him. He says, “C’m on, c’m on. Go with me.” We’re sitting in the coffee shop and I go, “All right, all right, I’ll go with you. Let me just finish this coffee and we’ll go watch them slice this fat bastard up.” That is not the type of thing that lead characters in successful sitcoms say. It’s not what you would call likable, at least not in the traditional network sense. But that’s what’s great about the show. We’re at the point where people understand the characters as human beings and they’ll accept that. What makes it fun for me is being that honest—because that’s what I would say in real life—without hurting my likability.

PLAYBOY: You’ve said that after five seasons you’re gone. Time magazine recently posited that your show might be around for 10.

SEINFELD: I can guarantee you we won’t do 10. I don’t want to be in people’s faces. This show is going to be off way sooner than anyone would believe.

PLAYBOY: So do you worry about being overexposed?

SEINFELD: Yes, I do. There are certain movies where the promotion is so well coordinated and so pervasive that, before the movie comes out, I hate it, just because they’re so good at telling me about it. They’ve done such a complete job of selling that it breeds resentment.

PLAYBOY: And yet you’ve been everywhere lately.

SEINFELD: I was working yesterday with a magazine photographer, and the wardrobe woman and I were talking about this. They wanted to do a cover line on me—America Loves Jerry Seinfeld or something like that. I said, “That’s not good. That’s going to make people hate me. If you say that about someone, it defines a relationship with the public and then propels it to end badly. A love affair is a relationship, and that has to end badly.” And she said, “It’s going to end badly anyway, no matter what.” That’s true: It ends badly anyway. So you might as well experience the peak of passion with whatever relationship we’re talking about, whether it’s with a person or, in this case, a professional relationship with the public. It’s going to end badly. Everything ends.

PLAYBOY: How does a Seinfeld episode evolve?

SEINFELD: Somebody comes up with an idea for a show—it could be just one line. And just hearing that one line makes you laugh. “Jerry picks up his car from the valet and there’s a smell that won’t come out.” “Jerry and Kramer go to watch an operation, and a Junior Mint falls into the body.” Virtually every show that we’ve done can be boiled down that way. It’s not like “Jerry’s nephew comes to visit for a week.” That doesn’t make you laugh.

PLAYBOY: What’s the one-liner for “The Contest”?

SEINFELD: Jerry, George, Kramer and Elaine decide to see who can go the longest without masturbation and who can remain master of their domain.

PLAYBOY: How would you do a one-liner for a show about this interview?

SEINFELD: We already did that. It’s “The Outing.” A reporter overhears Jerry and George joking around and then writes that they’re gay. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. *[Pauses]* You know, I was thinking about that show this morning. My friend Mario was in the kitchen, because he’s staying here. I was thinking, Gee, I wonder if this guy from Playboy thinks there’s something going on.

PLAYBOY: Frankly, that did immediately come to mind.

SEINFELD: Oh, really? That’s so funny!

PLAYBOY: Also, “Hey, he’s a damn good-looking guy.”

SEINFELD: *[Laughs]* Oh, that’s funny. Too bad we’ve already done the show. No, Mario’s just a comedian friend of mine.

PLAYBOY: But you’ve heard the rumors?

SEINFELD: Many. Somebody told me the other day that he heard I had special phone numbers for different levels of women. I don’t know what the hell that meant. And obviously I’ve heard that I’m gay. I’ve been told that everybody at NBC in New York thinks I’m gay.

PLAYBOY: Now’s your opportunity to state unequivocally that—

SEINFELD: I’m not gay.

PLAYBOY: When you’re in the heat of passion—

SEINFELD: Do I think of men? No.

PLAYBOY: Do you fold your clothes before you have sex?

SEINFELD: No. I generally don’t wear clothes during sex. Wait a second, wait a second! Are we up to the sex part?

PLAYBOY: We’re getting closer.

SEINFELD: All right!

PLAYBOY: Has a guy ever approached you?

SEINFELD: Once, in Rome. I decided to take a trip to Europe on my own, to see if I could meet people. This was a complete miscalculation of my personality. I don’t talk to anyone. I spent 10 days there without having one conversation, except with this guy. I was so thrilled to have someone to talk to, and I didn’t realize that he was hitting on me. But then it became obvious.

PLAYBOY: Is this misperception part of the reason that you did “The Outing” episode?

SEINFELD: No. That was actually Larry Charles’s idea. He’s our supervising producer. And when I heard it, not only did I think it was a great idea on its own but I also thought, perfect! It’s not something I’m uncomfortable with. I used to be. When you’re younger, if someone thinks you’re gay you get really upset about it. But now I just laugh. It means people are thinking too much about you.

PLAYBOY: Why do you take on topics like masturbation, nipples on Christmas cards and bad smells when other shows don’t?

SEINFELD: If I may be so immodest, it takes some pretty skillful writing to do these things and make them comfortable for people to watch on a mass level. Anybody can write a funny show about masturbation. But can you do it in an artful way that offends no one and, in fact, is even funnier than if you had come right out and talked about it? It takes skill. And when we re-ran that show last May we got our highest rating ever.

PLAYBOY: It’s a classic show. Right up there with the birth of Little Ricky.

SEINFELD: And, of course, the first time Little Ricky jerked off.

PLAYBOY: Why did you think you could pull it off?

SEINFELD: I’ll ignore your choice of phrase there. If it’s something no one else has done before, it’s challenging.

PLAYBOY: Were you just trying to see if you could get it past the censors?

SEINFELD: We’re not trying to get away with anything. That’s a completely different sensibility. I want to see if I can do what I want to do without pushing people’s moral envelope, or whatever. And if we can’t, then we don’t do it. We wanted to do a show in which Elaine would be stuck in a subway and miss her stop, and be on her way to Harlem. Kind of explore her fear of having to get off the subway in Harlem. We couldn’t find a way to do it without people getting the wrong impression. It was coming off racist. It was too small a needle to thread, so we abandoned it.

PLAYBOY: How did you hook up with the show’s co-creator, Larry David?

SEINFELD: We’ve known each other since about 1976, 1977. We were both doing stand-up. But stand-up isn’t his form. It’s too crass for what he does. Larry has a brilliant flair for staging and direction. There is no show without him. He has, more than me, created this enterprise. My skill has been to help him interpret his ideas. He filters things through me. I contribute lines and jokes.

PLAYBOY: Do you wish you could have done it all by yourself?

SEINFELD: No. I have stand-up for that. I’m not out for the credit. I’m just glad to be doing something that’s not bad TV.

PLAYBOY: What do you watch on TV?

SEINFELD: I could never watch sitcoms before I started doing one. But now they’re really interesting because I see what they’re trying to do, where they’re succeeding, where they’re failing. It used to be only The Honeymooners, sports, news, animal shows.

PLAYBOY: The Discovery Channel?

SEINFELD: Yeah. Shark Week. I always love how one animal is the star each week. And you want him to kill whatever he’s trying to kill because you’re on his side. If it’s the lion, you want him to get that boar. The next week it’s about boars. Now you’re hoping that the boar gets away from the lion. Your loyalty is so fickle with these animal shows.

PLAYBOY: What did you watch as a kid?

SEINFELD: Rocky and Bullwinkle, Jonny Quest, Spider-Man, Batman. Flipper was a big favorite. Comedy-wise, Ed Sullivan, Red Skelton, Jonathan Winters, the Smothers Brothers.

PLAYBOY: Was yours a happy childhood?

SEINFELD: I had a lot of fun. I rode my bike a lot, went swimming. I was a Cub Scout. I had a Schwinn Sting Ray, blue metallic with, of course, the banana seat. The first one in Harbor Green to have one. The other kids went nuts. I was very proud of that.

PLAYBOY: What did you want as a kid that you couldn’t get?

SEINFELD: The Schwinn Sting Ray. And once I got it, I was very happy. It’s pretty much the same with the Porsche. At about 13, I realized I wanted a Porsche, and I was unhappy until I got it. Now I have it and I’m happy.

PLAYBOY: What’s next?

SEINFELD: Nothing. I’m set.

PLAYBOY: How were you with girls?

SEINFELD: Uneventful. I kind of withdrew from a lot of social activity. I didn’t like group mentality and group behavior. I wanted to focus in on one person. I wanted to tell that person what I think about nuances and details and substructures. And you don’t do that in groups.

PLAYBOY: Not when you’re just eight years old.

SEINFELD: And even now you don’t. You go to parties and it’s all breezy bullshitting, chitchatting. I like that up to a point, but then I’m bored by it. I want to sit with somebody and get down to the nuts and bolts.

PLAYBOY: When you’re at a party, where do you stand?

SEINFELD: I’ll tell you what happens when I go to a party. I’ll open the door and I’ll walk in. And I’ll keep walking—and it usually won’t be far—until I hit a spot where someone stops me or I see someone I know and I start talking. That is the spot I will stay in for the entire party. I sometimes wonder: Why can’t I get deeper into the room?

PLAYBOY: Any clue?

SEINFELD: I guess it’s because I immediately try to make the best of the situation I’m in. I think that’s a key component of my personality. I’m not as interested in changing my situation as I am in improving the one I have, which I think is good. I mean, I always do the best I can with what I have.

PLAYBOY: Is that your philosophy of life?

SEINFELD: No, it just occurred to me. But I’d like to change that. I would like to walk through more of the room and be at four or five different places by the end of the party. *[Looks down at his new sneakers]* The tongue on this shoe is really short. And you know what? That makes or breaks a shoe in my book. Look at how short that is. That is no goddamn good. This will never be one of my favorites.

PLAYBOY: You’ve said that small talk is excruciating for you. Do you give the impression that you don’t want to talk to people?

SEINFELD: I generally don’t want to. Most people are not equipped to discuss the things I want to discuss, which is sneaker tongues and

things like that. They haven't thought about it, they have no ideas about it. That's why Larry David and I just go on forever. He's equipped to discuss anything.

PLAYBOY: Would you talk about sneaker tongues if somebody else brought it up?

SEINFELD: Yeah, I love it. I light up when somebody else brings it up. I go, "Okay, now I have a player here. Let's talk."

PLAYBOY: You're always buying and wearing new pairs of sneakers. Do you have a sneaker fetish?

SEINFELD: I've always liked sneakers—that was something I responded to even at six years old. I drove my mother crazy about getting me sneakers. She wouldn't let me wear them in the winter. She would set a day when I was allowed to start wearing sneakers again.

PLAYBOY: What kind did you wear?

SEINFELD: Keds. My favorite ones were the dark-blue kind that you could get only in the city. On Long Island they had only black. I've got a picture of me wearing them in my first grade class. Every other kid in the picture has regular shoes on. I'm in high tops.

PLAYBOY: Apparently this runs deeper than anyone suspected.

SEINFELD: All comedians have an obsession about their feet. If I see a comedian during the day with a pair of shoes on, I stop him, grab him and go, "What is going on?" You just never see it. Comedians hate shoes.

PLAYBOY: Why?

SEINFELD: Comedians like to be comfortable. But more than that, it's clinging to your youthful mood. I always wanted to be ready to play ball if anyone suggested it. I didn't want to have to go home and change. Your shoes are important because they define your relationship to the earth. I like to have something playful on my feet.

PLAYBOY: We hear that you don't keep them if they get as much as a tiny scuff.

SEINFELD: Another media-driven scandal. Not true. But I do give old pairs away to the less fortunate—who at this point are pretty much everybody.

PLAYBOY: How many pairs do you have?

SEINFELD: Right now I'm a little low. Probably 15 or 20. I really need to get some more.

PLAYBOY: Let's investigate a couple of your other notable quirks. What about your love of flossing?

SEINFELD: More bullshit. I flossed after lunch one day at the show, and a magazine writer decided that meant I'm obsessed with flossing. I floss twice a day. That's what my dentist told me to do, so I do it.

PLAYBOY: What about your involvement with Scientology?

SEINFELD: I took a couple courses a number of years ago that I thought were fabulous. I learned a lot and I had a good experience with it.

PLAYBOY: You're not an unwitting dupe of the church?

SEINFELD: No, I've always had the skill of extracting the essence of any subject I study, be it meditation, yoga, Scientology, Judaism, Zen. Whatever it is, I go in to get what I need. To me, these are supermarkets. I go in to get my supplies, then I leave.

PLAYBOY: Most of your friends are comics. Why is that?

SEINFELD: I love funny people.

PLAYBOY: We hear time and time again that most comics are venal, self-centered and not nice.

SEINFELD: There are guys driving bread trucks who fit the same description. I feel comfortable with comics. We understand one another. Here's a good question for you the next time you interview a comic: If you had to be stuck in a room for the rest of your life with one person, and either you would be funny or that person would be funny, which would you prefer? That's a good one, isn't it?

PLAYBOY: What's the answer?

"I'd like to play the London Palladium when I'm 100, just like George Burns."

SEINFELD: I would prefer that the other person be funny. To not laugh is worse than to not be funny.

PLAYBOY: Many comics might choose the other option.

SEINFELD: Not the good ones. If you're up there for yourself, you're not as good as if you're up there for them. That's how I break them down. That's how I cut the comedy community in half. For whose benefit are you onstage?

PLAYBOY: Is that why you've said there should be no stars in comedy?

SEINFELD: Yes. Stars can succeed by concealing who they are. Comedians can't.

PLAYBOY: But you've become a star.

SEINFELD: Well, not in my mind—and that's the one we're talking about. Do I look like a star to you?

PLAYBOY: Nope, just a regular guy. How have the experiences of your friends who have become famous prepared you for the change in your life?

SEINFELD: They haven't. Jay Leno is really the only one I knew well, and I watched him take off. But you have no idea how you're going to respond to it. Jay and I are very different. Jay's the ultimate public-service guy. I mean, when he gets 30 calls about a joke that was offensive, he calls every one of those people and finds out why or apologizes. I don't respond to the public that way. This is my thing, take it or leave it.

PLAYBOY: Is it true that you and Jay sit around and critique comics just for fun?

SEINFELD: All comedians do it. Comedians gossip endlessly. They love to bullshit their lives away; that's why they became comedians.

PLAYBOY: Weren't you once considered as the guest host for David Letterman?

SEINFELD: He said that one time in an interview. I don't think that was ever at a serious stage. He mentioned me as a fill-in if he were on vacation or something.

PLAYBOY: Are you interested in being a talk-show host?

SEINFELD: No. I could never maintain the illusion that I really give a damn about when this person's movie is coming out, or show any interest in the person. The brilliance of Letterman, the genius of Letterman, is that he can conduct an in-

terview with someone he does not respect without compromising himself and, at the same time, he lets us know how he feels. I'm amazed by that. I could never play that edge the way he does.

PLAYBOY: Explain the differences between Jay and Dave.

SEINFELD: Jay reads the books. Every day they screen the movie of the guest who's coming on the next day. Leno does incredible research. He is like John Riggins of the Washington Redskins. He was the kind of guy to whom you would give the ball and he would plow into that line over and over again.

PLAYBOY: What about Dave?

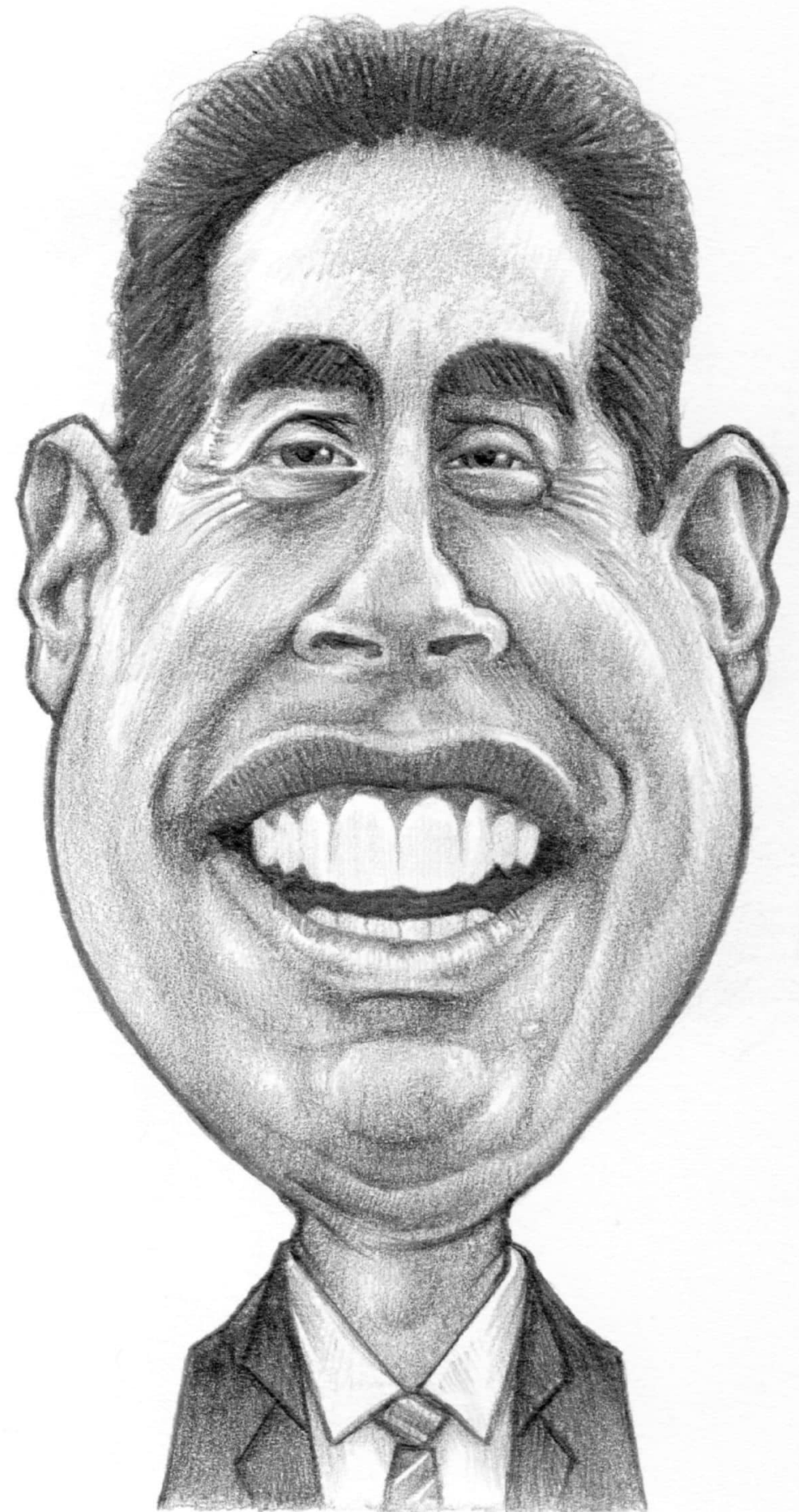
SEINFELD: Letterman's a little more offbeat. Letterman is like Crazy Legs Hirsch.

PLAYBOY: Since both Letterman and Leno are your pals, how did you feel about their jockeying for position before Dave decided to go with CBS?

SEINFELD: It was as uncomfortable for me as it was for them. But they were cool about it. They understand the inherent brutality of show business, and that was just one of those episodes. Two wildebeests are walking down the street and the lion's in the bushes. Somebody's going to get eaten. But it seems to have worked out well for both.

PLAYBOY: Did you talk to Dave and Jay during the battle?

SEINFELD: Yeah. They both felt it was terrible that it had to be like that. But friends compete in sports all the time. Look at Jordan and Barkley. There is no acrimony. Luckily, they're two professional guys who





are fairly secure.

PLAYBOY: Is it difficult to choose which show you’re going to appear on?

SEINFELD: No. Being on Carson was like being on your dad’s show. Being on Letterman or with Leno is like being on your friend’s show. I kind of miss the fear. I don’t feel out of place anymore. I miss putting together the suit and tie, very conservative so as not to offend.

PLAYBOY: Now you don’t depend on talk-show appearances for a living.

SEINFELD: Now who gives a shit?

PLAYBOY: There are some who are afraid to go on Dave’s show.

SEINFELD: But that’s just a matter of being funny. With the Carson show there were all these other points of protocol that you worried about: the OK finger versus the not-OK finger at the end of your set, the suit and the idea of, “What if I went on without a tie? Oh, my God!” It was like throwing a Molotov cocktail. I don’t think about things like that now.

PLAYBOY: How many times were you on with Carson?

SEINFELD: Thirty.

PLAYBOY: Did he wave you over to the couch the first time?

SEINFELD: No, it was like the fourth or fifth.

PLAYBOY: Was it devastating?

SEINFELD: No, I knew this was the process. I wasn’t one of these phenoms where the guy gets called over his first time, hits a home run in his first at-bat. I always did well, but they have to warm up to you. They tell you, “Mr. Carson thought you were very funny.” That type of thing.

PLAYBOY: And no one inspires that kind of fear now?

SEINFELD: I can’t put myself in the position of just starting out anymore. Now, if I did The Tonight Show and they said, “Mr. Leno didn’t feel that your material was strong enough,” I’d say, “I didn’t think he was so funny either.”

PLAYBOY: What about you and Howard Stern?

SEINFELD: We have a lot of fun.

PLAYBOY: You have a lot of fun with a guy who recently said he wishes your house would fall off the mountain, that you would get cancer and die?

SEINFELD: Yeah, he’s funny. People don’t understand the Howard Stern character. We were laughing our asses off.

PLAYBOY: Wait. Supposedly, his feelings were really hurt because of something you said about him in an interview.

SEINFELD: He was offended. He’s a sensitive guy, if you can believe that. I called him an amusing jerk. So I went on his show and told him that I stand by my comment. We had this really hostile exchange. Then, as soon as he’d go to a commercial, we’d both be laughing. That show is all playacting.

PLAYBOY: Was that all set up from the beginning?

SEINFELD: It’s just kind of understood. He makes fun of me, I make fun of him. It’s friends ragging on each other for the fun of it. Hey, if I really thought he didn’t like me, why would I give a damn about him and go on his show?

PLAYBOY: What does Howard want to know that you won’t tell him?

SEINFELD: He’s always asking me about dates and women.

PLAYBOY: How did you feel when he grilled your ex-girlfriend, comic Carol Leifer, about your sex life?

SEINFELD: I was a little embarrassed about that, especially since we broke up 17 years ago.

PLAYBOY: She said you were good.

SEINFELD: Yeah, she was just being sweet. Nobody remembers.

PLAYBOY: And he grilled her not only about your sex life but also about your penis size.

SEINFELD: Hey, that’s kind of personal. Come to think of it, I like Don Imus better. And I mention that because I know it will really irritate Howard, which is always gratifying to me.

PLAYBOY: This might be the perfect time to interject a guest question from a young woman—and fan—who watched “The Contest” and wanted to know if in fact you are the master of your domain.

SEINFELD: No. My empire has crumbled.

PLAYBOY: She wanted specifics on frequency. And when—in the morning? In the evening?

SEINFELD: I’ll need her home number.

PLAYBOY: Creams? Oils?

SEINFELD: Well, we’re definitely into it now. Tell her that the show, while being lifelike and entertaining, is basically an exercise in fiction. I’ll tell you something interesting about me. It’s probably my biggest secret, the biggest skeleton in my closet. I didn’t discover masturbation until after I lost my virginity. I don’t understand how everybody else knew about it and I didn’t. Nobody told me about it. I don’t know how they found out about it. I didn’t know this technique was available to me. I don’t know how it happened, but somehow I was absent that day. And when I discovered it, I thought, Well, that’s the end of that. I’m never going to get upset about a woman ever again!

PLAYBOY: How soon after your first sexual encounter did you learn—

SEINFELD: Right after. Nah, just kidding.

PLAYBOY: So who told you?

SEINFELD: It was my college roommate. We were talking one day, and he told me.

PLAYBOY: Were you embarrassed?

SEINFELD: Are you kidding? I would love to tell people about this. What a tremendous gift to give another human being, to tell them, “You know, here’s what you can do....”

PLAYBOY: Is that basically how it happened?

SEINFELD: That’s a funny version of it.

PLAYBOY: Which parent told you about sex, and what did he or she tell you?

SEINFELD: I don’t really remember how I learned. They said they showed me a book or played me a record or something. They swore they told me all about it, but I don’t recall it. I think I learned from that book, the David Reuben book, Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid to Ask). I found a copy when I was in high school, and that was helpful.

PLAYBOY: Don’t get excited. This isn’t the sex part, but since you brought it up, when did you lose your virginity?

SEINFELD: I’m not sure whether I was 19 or 20.

PLAYBOY: Not sure?

SEINFELD: I’m not positive, to tell you the truth. I remember the place. I remember whom. I was in a relationship, so it wasn’t a seduction.

PLAYBOY: A lot of men lose their virginity at a much younger age.

SEINFELD: I’m not pushy. I remember being upset about it having taken so long. Might have been 20. I should probably call it a “technical” at 19, but the red light—sorry about the metaphor—came on when I was 20. So I’m willing now to admit that as a teenager I never had sex. And I was the master of my domain. And I’ll tell you this: At the age of 39, I’ve almost caught up with everybody else. I think I’m even.

PLAYBOY: Why so late?

SEINFELD: I hated the idea of upsetting a woman in any way, so the slightest amount of resistance would deter me. I had no persistence at all. Still don’t, really. If she is at all reticent, I’m out of there. It kills the mood for me. I don’t want to sell anybody anything. It’s one area of my life where I’m extremely—

PLAYBOY: Shy?

SEINFELD: Yeah. Still very shy about it. I’m not pushy.

PLAYBOY: Of course, now you don’t have to be.

SEINFELD: No, I still have to be.

PLAYBOY: How much has fame changed the equation?

SEINFELD: It’s changed it, but it hasn’t really improved it. In some ways, women are put off by it. They think I’m dating millions of women, they think they won’t be special. They think I’ll take them for granted.

PLAYBOY: True?

SEINFELD: No.

PLAYBOY: Are you willing to make the first move now?

SEINFELD: Yes, I am. I feel confident enough to do that now. [Gets up and goes into the kitchen] Do you mind if I do these dishes?

PLAYBOY: You like doing dishes?

SEINFELD: I like the water and I like the soap [*soaps some glasses and plates*].

PLAYBOY: Do you like to iron?

SEINFELD: No. I like vacuuming, though. I like the way the carpet looks after I'm done. I like those lines the wheels make.

PLAYBOY: While we're in the kitchen, maybe we should mention your fascination with cereal. The Seinfeld kitchen is jammed with cereal boxes. You have stashes in your Los Angeles and New York homes. Why?

SEINFELD: It's the first thing I could make when I was a kid. I was proud of it. I love milk.

PLAYBOY: So cereal is just a means to an end?

SEINFELD: I think so. I really like anything with milk.

PLAYBOY: Your face will soon be on a box of cereal, right?

SEINFELD: Yeah. Kellogg's low-fat granola. [Takes a small package from the cereal box] I love things like this: They put the raisins in a special packet. I guess it keeps them moist and juicy.

PLAYBOY: What's your favorite cereal?

SEINFELD: I constantly change my allegiances. Right now I'm in this Cheerios mode. I'm sure the Kellogg's people won't be happy to hear that. [Scrambling] Corn-flakes, though—you really can't beat cornflakes. If you had to have one cereal the rest of your life, it would have to be corn-flakes.

PLAYBOY: Let's turn to your cereal days as a comic. When did you know you had made it?

SEINFELD: When I turned in my waiter's apron in September of 1976. I was working at Brew and Burger on Third and 53rd. Ten to two—lunch. I got a gig emceeding at the Comic Strip. I already had one night, then I got another night, and it was like 35 bucks a night. I thought I could make it on 70 bucks a week. So I turned in the apron. I went out to visit my parents. I remember standing on the platform of the Long Island Railroad in Massapequa. That was the highest moment of my career. I was a comedian. I had made it.

PLAYBOY: Has anything compared to that since then?

SEINFELD: No. That was the transition from man to superman.

PLAYBOY: You've always said your dad was a funny guy. Did he think you had a shot at a career in comedy?

SEINFELD: Oh, yeah. He was extremely encouraging about it. He was a salesman, and that's a similar type of life. You're really not doing any legitimate kind of work, you're just making a living talking people into things. That isn't too much different from what a comedian does.

PLAYBOY: What did he sell?

SEINFELD: Signs.

PLAYBOY: Signs? Seinfeld?

SEINFELD: A coincidence. Anyway, I had been doing comedy for a few months by then. My parents were fine with it. They weren't quite sure what I was doing. They really didn't know how serious I was about it. But they always took everything in stride. Their life didn't revolve around me. If I was happy, they were happy.

PLAYBOY: Whom did their lives revolve around?

SEINFELD: Everybody did what they wanted to do. We were all just kind of roommates. My parents never really had families. My mom grew

up in an orphanage and my father left home when he was young. They got married late in life—they were both in their mid- to late 30s. They were independent people.

PLAYBOY: Would you call yours an intimate family?

SEINFELD: No. We went on vacations together and we always had dinner together, but it wasn't that kind of cloying, got-to-talk-every-day thing. My mother doesn't call me every day. There was plenty of breathing room in the family. It was a healthy atmosphere.

PLAYBOY: What is your definition of intimacy?

SEINFELD: There are certain families in which people are all over one another. They look like newborn puppies. It's too much.

PLAYBOY: Would you describe yourself as an intimate person?

SEINFELD: It's hard to be intimate all by yourself. But I'm comfortable with intimacy, if that's what you're asking. I just haven't been involved with anyone seriously in quite a while. I have had a number of legitimate relationships, but the past few years I haven't. I've been too busy and it's been too difficult. And sometimes I wonder if I've lost the knack of it. Of course, I'm minimizing the whole experience by using the word knack. But I don't think so. No human being is immune to love and how it can change you.

PLAYBOY: Ever been in love?

"I didn't discover masturbation until after I lost my virginity. I don't understand how everybody else knew about it and I didn't."

a nice Jewish girl." And this is from a woman who—

SEINFELD: What do these women think? Why would I call someone like this? I don't know who they are. [Flustered] I mean, this is really quite mind-boggling. I find this astounding. I don't know them, they know me. Do they understand that TV works only one way? They get to see me, but I don't get to see them. This basic fact of electronics seems to get past a lot of people. It's beyond me. I don't know, maybe some people are that indiscriminate. I'm extremely careful about who I spend my time with.

PLAYBOY: The tabloids had a field day with one of your recent dates—with a 17-year-old.

SEINFELD: I was in a tabloid rocket to the moon. I'm telling you, that was too fun. That was so much fun. That was just absolutely hilarious to me.

PLAYBOY: Excuse us. We need to get a pan to catch the dripping sarcasm.

SEINFELD: [*Laughs*] I guess I haven't quite adjusted to celebrityhood because it's still hard for me to believe that anyone gives a damn who the hell I go out with or what I do.

So anyway, I met this girl, Shoshanna. She's a very sweet girl and she's very pretty. I didn't know how old she was. I knew she wasn't 40. I took her to a basketball game and that was the whole thing.

PLAYBOY: Did you meet her in the park like they say?

SEINFELD: Yeah, but the rest of it is all—

PLAYBOY: Is she 18?

SEINFELD: She's 18 now.

PLAYBOY: When did she tell you her age?

SEINFELD: When the article came out.

PLAYBOY: You took her to the basketball game and now the tabloids are calling you a cradle snatcher.

SEINFELD: Cradle snatcher! It was a wonderful article. I couldn't believe how nice they were about it.

PLAYBOY: Nice?

SEINFELD: Everybody was saying, "I don't see anything wrong with it. If they like each other. . . ." My manager couldn't believe it. He said I'm bulletproof even in the tabloids. They had every chance really to stick the knife in and they didn't do it. They could have said anything: I'm taking advantage of her, she doesn't know what's going on, her parents are upset, my mother wanted to disown me. They could have made up anything.

PLAYBOY: How did Shoshanna feel about all the attention?

SEINFELD: Didn't bother her a bit.

PLAYBOY: Kids today.

SEINFELD: The great thing is you can go out on a date and pick up a little babysitting money on the side. That pays for the pizza. She's a very nice girl.

PLAYBOY: What have your friends said about this?

SEINFELD: It's really strange. The reactions ran the absolute gamut from horrified to just busting buttons with pride that they know me. Guys I hadn't heard from in years called to say, "Congratulations! Good for you." Women I know wouldn't even call me back. My assistant punched me. She saw me and literally punched me, she was so mad. It was reviled by women in their 30s and by Jay Leno.

PLAYBOY: Leno?

SEINFELD: Leno was just terrified. To him any potential public-relations imbroglio, any appearance of impropriety, is the most terrifying thing in the world. He was scared for me, just out of concern as a friend.

PLAYBOY: Did he do anything in the monologue?

SEINFELD: No, he would never do anything like that. But my mother was thrilled because Shoshanna is Jewish and Syrian. My mother's Syrian. And all my aunts and uncles on the Syrian side, this is what they expect. They figure 15, 16 is the right age [for a woman] for me, because that's the way they do it in Syria. So they're going, "Eighteen? She's a little over the hill, but if you like her. . . ."

My women friends, some of them were really hostile about it. They didn't like it. First of all, they think I look for this. Like this was an ambition of mine. But the fact is, I don't meet that many women I like, period. So when I like someone, I don't care about her race, creed or national origin. If I like her, I don't care. I don't discriminate. If she's 18, if she's intelligent, that's fine.

PLAYBOY: So, is it love?

SEINFELD: No, no, it was just a couple cups of coffee.

PLAYBOY: And a basketball game.

SEINFELD: I'm also dating a woman who's 39. I'm trying to pander to whatever personal prejudice people have. See, the thing is, my own age isn't really real to me. I look in the mirror and I just don't feel 39. I don't feel any different than I was when I was 23. And I don't look that much different. So it's weird. Look, I don't have impossible qualifications. All that I want in a woman is sweet, smart and sexy.

PLAYBOY: Frankly, we're surprised you weren't more careful about going out in public with Shoshanna. The walls have cameras.

SEINFELD: Can you believe it? Can you believe how naive I can be?

PLAYBOY: What's your idea of a fun date?

SEINFELD: To me the ultimate date is dinner and a movie. My fantasies are all of normalcy, because I don't get to do a lot of these things. As you know, I'm a great fan of the mundane anyway. So, to me, dinner and a movie—I can't imagine a more fabulous evening than to have enough time to do that and to have scheduled that so it works. And then you have coffee later. That's just orgasmic for me.

PLAYBOY: Having gone from a successful stand-up career to this saturation in the media, how has your popularity, on a percentage basis, increased the number of female opportunities available to you?

SEINFELD: [Laughs] We're getting there! I feel it coming now. The sex part! Yeah! The sex part! You can't keep it from me any longer. You can't hide. This is the sex part. [Laughs] No, the percentage is the same: It's all women, 100 percent. A percentage increase in the number of female opportunities? Hard to believe we're not in a Citibank board meeting here. I know you want an answer to this question, but here's the problem: Along with the saturation there's a price. And that price is the enemy of all living things: time. I can go out on a date maybe two or three times a month, 10 months out of the year. That's a maximum. It's a funny situation. You get yourself to this point in life where you have a nice job, a nice car, a nice place to live, you know where the good restaurants are—and you can't go.

PLAYBOY: Is that a problem for you?

SEINFELD: No, it's a problem for my dates. That's why I'm not involved—the kind of woman who would put up with that is not the kind of woman I want.

You know, I never imagined being at this particular point in show business. Currently, I can do almost anything I want. I can meet almost anybody I want. I'm what they call "hot" right now, this second. Come back tomorrow, it could all be different. I have to manage that. It's a good word, heat, because it has a destructive quality to it. I'm careful about it. The fire heats the home and can also burn it down, as my father used to love to say. But as long as I'm at this apex, I want to experience it to the maximum and make

the most of it.

PLAYBOY: Does this mean you'll be a lonely guy for a while longer?

SEINFELD: No. I'm never lonely. Even when I'm alone I'm not lonely. That's another reason I'm a good comic: A lot of time alone never bothered me. By the way, I would like to meet all the women I'm in this issue with. It seems like I should. I think when people read an issue they assume that all the people in the magazine know one another. Like they were all there that day. One guy's getting interviewed, the Playmate's getting photographed, someone else is doing a wine ad and there're a bunch of football players in some other room getting their picture taken. And they're all at the Mansion. I think that's the Playboy image.

PLAYBOY: Maybe we should have a party in your honor and invite everyone in the issue. Will you come?

SEINFELD: Absolutely. Besides, I've never been to the Mansion. And I really think you owe me that.

PLAYBOY: And something else, as well.

SEINFELD: Yeah, the sex question. Have we done it? I think everyone is looking forward to the sex question.

PLAYBOY: We're sorry, but we have run out of time.



GIGI *Payovich*

Instagram @gigi4prez

Photography by Cory Makes Magic | @corymakesmagic









Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! What are the plans this year for you? It's an honor to be featured! This year I plan to finish school and get my degree. I also plan to work on furthering my modeling career.

What is at the top of your list to achieve the most in the year 2022? Other than getting my degree, I hope to collaborate with different creative artists on editorials and build my portfolio.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? It is important for me to be seen that way because women are more than just their appearance. There is so much more we have to offer than looks, I want people who know me to recognize my independence, strength, and knowledge. For the people who don't me, I want them to understand that there is more to who I am as a person than what meets the eye. I am proud of my personality and how hard I've worked to gain knowledge and grow as a person.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? I grew up in artistic environments my whole life and have a deep appreciation and

love for all things creative. I like to push the boundaries of uniqueness in modeling and ideas for shoots to make something out of this world.

Where are we most likely to find you if not in front of the camera being glamorous? I'm most likely to be found going out and having fun with friends or in my room working on a painting/art project.

What are some of your biggest passions? Music is definitely one of my biggest passions. I love that it is a universal language everyone can connect to regardless of race, gender, language, etc. I also have a very strong passion for drawing/painting and dancing.

3 ultimate deal-breakers when it comes to men? 1.) Immaturity. 2.) No sense of humor. 3.) Lack of motivation.

What are some of the things that attract you to a man? I'm attracted to men who are funny and confident in themselves without being arrogant. I love a man who is smart and caring for others around them. Intelligence is sexy!

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? Things are always changing, so this is a hard question, but if I had to guess I would say hopefully modeling for designer brands in Paris or Milan.

What is the wrong way to approach you as an admirer? I am always flattered by my admirers, but I don't want anyone to feel bad about themselves or put themselves down in comparison to me. I'm human too, and I don't want people to think they aren't good enough because they view me as superior. It is really nice when people admire me, but I want them to understand that they also have qualities that make them a beautiful person as well.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? I mainly post all updates and photos on my Instagram @gigi4prez.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? Always stick to what you're passionate about and surround yourself with others who motivate you to keep reaching for your goals!





Tim & Eric At 10

Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job! debuted a decade ago. What do its creators make of the fact that our president may as well be one of the show's grotesquely comical characters?

BY DANIELLE BACHER PHOTOGRAPHY BY MILLICENT HAILES

“Someone give me a goddamn belt! My pants keep falling off!”

Tim Heidecker kicks off a pair of Kenneth Cole slacks and crosses the floor in black boxer briefs and matching socks, jiggling his belly to the AM classic “Rich Girl” blaring from the next room. Meanwhile, Eric Wareheim is shaving his face with an electric razor, fashioning a luxurious mustache. There’s no air-conditioning in this downtown Los Angeles loft, and sweat glistens across his brow. Peeling off an XL T-shirt—he stands an ursine six-and-a-half-feet tall—Wareheim exposes his richly carpeted chest. “Damn, I look good,” he says to the mirror as he adjusts a pair of aviators.

These two aren’t quite household names, but they’ve spent the past 13 years carving out an unmistakable and ever-growing niche in the pop-culture landscape. They’re currently at work on the second season of their horror-comedy anthology Tim & Eric’s Bedtime Stories. Heidecker also heads up the Adult Swim series Decker (think 24 on a public-access budget), as well as On Cinema, and Wareheim has reached new heights of visibility playing Aziz Ansari’s best friend on the Netflix series Master of None. But as a unit, they’re best known for Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!, whose 10th anniversary they’re commemorating with a live tour and a special episode, which aired last Sunday. Spanning five seasons, Awesome Show delivered lo-fi production, gross anatomy and frenetic non sequiturs in 11-minute doses. Some of the more memorable sequences include a holiday episode in which both men unexpectedly start lactating (they proceed to hand out bottles of their “man milk” as gifts); a scene featuring a pubic-hair milkshake, which Heidecker drinks in the hopes of growing an epic “pube mound”; and a series of ads in which a mangy-bearded Wareheim hawks live child clowns.

The creative process behind retina scorchers like these was surprisingly mundane. During the show’s run, Heidecker and Wareheim would meet up in L.A. restaurants to eat BLTs and discuss forthcoming episodes. No matter how surreal (or gross) the finished product, most of their ideas came from scanning their environment.

“I’ll be driving and think, Ah, Lamborghini. What can we do with that?” says Heidecker. “It’s a very layered process. We go out and make a lot of raw material that doesn’t become what it is until it’s edited and put together.” Wareheim agrees, adding that he “loves to fuck with people—not as a mean thing but to entertain ourselves.”

Heidecker insists he has always rejected the idea of “anti-comedy.” Despite material that strays far from the traditional setup-to-punch-line framework, their goal is not to alienate or unnerve audiences, the way Andy Kaufman did in his heyday by reading *The Great Gatsby* onstage; they simply want to make people, themselves included, laugh. Nor is their comedy meant to appeal only to stoned hipsters. In fact, many would be surprised to learn they actually create their comedy while sober. “I thought it was cheating when I was high or tripping. I don’t consider that as coming from me,” says Wareheim. “When it came to what made me laugh, it was a realness and the man on the street who wasn’t an actor doing something weird. We do what we love and love what we do, but we have to be razor-sharp. To act weird is a lot of work.”

The two concede that not everyone comprehends their absurdity, stoned or not. “I met a guy the other day who told me he got a divorce because of us,” says Heidecker, giggling. “He said, ‘My wife always hated you guys and she just couldn’t get it.’ But it’s just a comedy show!”

“Sara Smile” begins in the background, and Heidecker



sighs. It’s possible he has hit his quota of Hall & Oates for the day. Now Wareheim is prancing around in his underwear, caressing his throat in slow motion. “Let’s do this!” he yells to the crew. A wardrobe team surrounds Heidecker, guiding him into a baby blue Byblos suit.

“Awesome Show is definitely deep in our hearts,” Wareheim says. “We were making the same exact thing in college. We were outsiders even back then. We didn’t like anyone in our Film 101 class.” He pauses, rethinking. “Well, it’s not that we didn’t like them,” he says, laughing. “We didn’t respect them. We knew we could eventually make something better.”

Now 41 years old, Heidecker and Wareheim met at Temple University in Philadelphia as freshmen in 1994. On their first day, they swapped inappropriate stories to make each other laugh, causing a disruption in the auditorium. “We immediately got in trouble and had to see the teacher after class,” recalls Wareheim. “We were bad and got yelled at—in college. Then we ended up in the same dorm as all the basketball players. So it was one big jock party, and then us.”

Heidecker adds, “They were like, ‘Where is all the pot smoke coming from?’”

The first video assignment they did together was a bit called “Find That Chicken.” “Even then there was a lot of Tim and Eric in it,” says Heidecker. “It was this stupid thing with a British phone booth, and I was wearing a full chicken suit. It was the dumbest thing ever, but we knew we would be making so many more projects.” Eventually they decided to launch a website, TimandEric.com, expanding their catalog of strange and transgressive humor.

After college, Wareheim began shooting videos for weddings and Jewish events in Pennsylvania, and Heidecker took an office job in Manhattan. In 2002, they packaged a selection of shorts and sent it to Robert Smigel, Dan Harmon, Rob Schrab and other comics they admired. The first to respond was Bob Odenkirk, co-creator of HBO’s seminal sketch series *Mr. Show*. (Nowadays, Odenkirk is best known as the title character on *Better Call Saul*.) To Odenkirk’s surprise, the two upstarts had included glossy head shots, a letter on proper stationery,



He continues, “Their influence was clearly massive, though. They even influenced *Saturday Night Live* to the point where they have two or three pieces that look like—well, you can almost call them rip-offs. That’s a pretty big deal.”

Indeed, SNL aired a 2010 sketch with Kristen Wiig and Amy Poehler titled “Ladies Who Lunch,” in which a gaggle of social-ites try to one-up each other with smaller and smaller hats. It bears distinct similarities to “Tiny Hats” (a commercial parody about an auto-parts store that sells very small hats), which had aired on *Awesome Show* years earlier. In March 2016, the good folks at Cheez-It Baked Snack Crackers uploaded a Facebook video that resembles a sequence from season four of *Awesome Show*. (In both cases a man has his “mind blown” with the help of some lo-fi visual effects.) Fans cried foul, and Kellogg’s pulled the ad—but not before it had garnered nearly 4 million views. Heidecker weighed in via Splitsider, saying, in part, “Pretty straightforward rip, and I hope Turner’s legal department digs into this and helps protect our ‘intellectual’ property!”

The two have infiltrated mainstream entertainment more directly through their commercial and video work. A campaign with Old Spice starring Terry Crews and another with Loctite adhesive (who could forget that notorious Super Bowl XLIX ad?), along with music videos for acts including Depeche Mode, Maroon 5 and Major Lazer—all constitute a stealth infiltration, a steady creep of DIY weirdness onto prime-time TV.

“It’s extremely difficult to do what they do and make it work,” notes Odenkirk. “At first it just seems like absurdity and a kind of studied editorial clumsiness or visual crudeness being played with. But the truth is, what makes their presentation work is an instinctual awareness of how to play the moment. You can’t copy it. Only they can do it.”

DVDs—and an invoice.

“At first I thought I should throw it in the garbage, which I would usually do,” says Odenkirk. “But then I was like, What the hell? I opened it, and alongside was this itemized bill for the postage, tapes, dubbing and editing. It was ridiculous and wonderfully executed, so I thought these guys were probably funny. I watched it, and I remember thinking it was inventive and very different, some semi-animated and music-video stuff, but it all came from this comical mix. If you like their voice, it was unique and rare.”

But as Odenkirk, their eventual executive producer, admits, not everyone understood the humor—and maybe the humor didn’t quite understand itself yet. They learned this the hard way when they launched their first show together on Adult Swim, *Tom Goes to the Mayor*. “It didn’t work very well. I certainly knew it was funny, but I also knew what would become *Awesome Show* would work better,” Odenkirk says. “They did whatever the hell they wanted to do. There were no rules to *Awesome Show*.”

Odenkirk offered creative input, but Heidecker and Wareheim often delivered their own skewed version of what he’d pitched. “It was their own voice,” Odenkirk says. “They are self-starters in every way. They didn’t need me. I’m just the biggest fan, that’s all.”



A week before their PLAYBOY shoot, Heidecker and Wareheim are sipping cran-raspberry LaCroix at the Glendale office of Abso Lutely Productions. They founded the company in 2006, toward the end of Tom Goes to the Mayor’s run, because they’d had a bad experience with the company they’d been working with and wanted complete creative control. They even own a sound studio across the street from the headquarters, where they film many of their sketches.

On a coffee table is a copy of PAPER magazine’s winter 2014 issue with Kim Kardashian ass-naked on the cover. (Heidecker and Wareheim, flaunting Tammy Faye-level drag, appear in a beauty feature in that issue.) Beneath that is a copy of their quasi-Scien-tologist self-help book, Tim & Eric’s Zone Theory: 7 Easy Steps to Achieve a Perfect Life. They can’t decide if they wrote the book together or not. They tell me it’s unreadable.

Inevitably the conversation turns to our president. “I’ve been pleasantly surprised by him,” says Heidecker, laughing. He was part of the “30 Days, 50 Songs” campaign (previously known as “30 Days, 30 Songs” and since updated to “1,000 Days, 1,000 Songs”), contributing “Trump’s Pilot,” which envisions Trump dying in an intentional plane crash. (Father John Misty later covered the song.) In addition to his 2016 solo album, In Glendale, Heidecker has written a handful of satirical songs about 45, with lyrics such as “And on Saturday night when Melania’s a-fast asleep, I tiptoe to the only room where I really wanna be, and I crawl into that beautiful king-size bed and I snuggle between my true loves, Ivanka and Jared” and “Take me down to the bowels of Trump Tower... I’ll be hell-bent to call that motherfucker president.”

It’s no surprise that Trump has inspired the two comedians. “He’s a Tim and Eric character, and he has been for years,” Heidecker says. And he’s right. The baffling hair, uneven skin tones, lowbrow speech patterns, ill-fitting attire and befuddled arrogance—all these are qualities Heidecker and Wareheim visit time and again in their work. It says something about the relevance of Awesome Show that the president of the United States makes it look a lot less hyperbolic than it would otherwise.

“I mean, it’s horrible,” Heidecker says about Trump. “He’s a disaster for our country, our future, our children, everything and everybody. But it’s the funniest thing every time he talks.”

The political climate comes up again when the two are asked to name one thing they can’t live without.

“Sean Spicer,” Wareheim shouts.

“My preteen sex dungeon,” Heidecker says. “Now you have to say, ‘Just kidding.’ I heard myself saying, ‘Don’t say anything about my preteen sex dungeon.’ There’s a conspiracy theory that glo-balists are running sex dungeons. It’s called Pizzagate. Look it up.”

They look at each other and laugh. You can tell they have a rare bond. When Wareheim was younger, he was awkward. He was over six feet tall by the age of 11, always felt self-conscious and never had a girlfriend. After meeting Heidecker, he came to realize he shouldn’t care what other people think. These days, he understands the insecurity and awkwardness and tries to use them to fuel his creativity. But no matter how mature or successful Wareheim and Heidecker become, the insecurity and awkwardness offer themselves up in spades. Heidecker admits he has a fear of death. “I was stabbed in my back by someone I know, and I didn’t immediately feel it,” he says. “I fear the moment of death, something we’re all going to experience at some point.” Wareheim has a fear of illness, and sometimes his dark thoughts take over. He believes he may have cancer. He doesn’t actually have it, but he fears it. He thinks he’ll eventually get something debilitating and lose his mind. “That shit is crazy,” he concludes.

That jittery muse has led to some extreme methods of achieving their vision. Sometimes while taping Awesome Show the two had trouble telling the actors and amateur talent what they wanted them to do, so they would bark orders into a microphone from another room. This was partially because what they were asking was ridiculous and partially because they wanted the performers to have no idea what was going on so they could capture an honest moment. It wasn’t a prank, though some clearly felt it was.

In one instance, Steve Schirripa, a.k.a. Bobby Bacala from The Sopranos, was doing a commercial spoof called “MyEggs,” about a pill that allows users to produce eggs out of their be-hinds. Schirripa had to sit on a toilet and pretend he was...using it. He had no idea going in that he would have to pull down his pants in front of an entire crew. On top of that, he had to say “Capisce?” “He just looks at me with this ‘Fuck no’ look on his face,” says Heidecker. “I felt bad. You can sense in the spot that there’s depression and disappointment there.” Wareheim adds, “But a lead on The Sopranos was sitting on a toilet, fake shitting. That’s insane!”

Asked if they might ever revive the “intellectual” property that is Awesome Show, the two are vague. They suspect it would eventually become a parody of itself. “There are probably lots of notes I would give it now, but what’s the point?” says Heidecker. “I’m not a very nostalgic person. I understand people who hate us. I get it. If you’re not on the same page, you can quickly become disgusted with us. If you’re not a fan, that’s never going to get better. We just become more and more annoying.”

“Yeah, you’re always going to hate us,” Wareheim says. “But, hey, I love us.”

TURN IT UP.

100,000+
PHOTOS

40,000+
MODELS

DAILY
UPDATES

Want to see more? Enjoy new galleries featuring Playmates, celebrities and newcomers everyday on PlayboyPlus.com.

VISIT [PLAYBOYPLUS.COM/](https://playboyplus.com/)
READER



SHOP THE RABBIT.



One-of-a-kind products.

The official site for Playboy clothing,
exclusive collections, accessories, and more.

VISIT PLAYBOYSHOP.COM

